

## THE UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

USDA NATIONAL FOOD STAMP     )  
CONVERSATION                    )

Jefferson Auditorium  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.  
Washington, D.C.

Thursday  
June 22, 2000

The above-entitled conversation was  
convened, pursuant to notice, at 1:07 p.m.

## APPEARANCES:

From USDA

Shirley R. Watkins, Undersecretary for Food,  
Nutrition and Consumer Services  
Richard Rominger, Deputy Secretary of  
Agriculture  
Julie Paradis, Deputy Undersecretary for Food,  
Nutrition and Consumer Services

Other Attendees

Jack Clauser, Department of Public Welfare, PA  
Len Perry, Eligibility Worker, Prince Georges  
County, MD  
John Robinson, Director, Martin Luther King,  
Jr. Community Center, VA

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## APPEARANCES (Continued):

Jim Weill, President, Food Research & Action Center, D.C.

Shawn Massey, Food Stamp Recipient, Prince Georges County, MD

Kimberly Prendergast, Public Policy Assistant, America's Second Harvest, Chicago, IL

Ray Campbell, Manager, Division of Payment Integrity, Baltimore Department of Social Services, MD

Patricia Young, National Coordinator, U.S. National Committee for World Hunger Day, D.C.

Cecilia Perry, Public Policy Analyst, American Federation of State, County, Municipal Employees, D.C.

Sheena McConnell, Senior Researcher, Mathematica Policy Research, D.C.

Michael J. Wilson, UFCW

Ruth Noel, Community Ministry, Montgomery County, MD

Mary Prioleau-Seares, Founder/President, E & L Caring Agency, NJ

Nancy Hatch, Presbyterian Church, USA

Laurel Weir, Policy Director, National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty, D.C.

Tom Wenning, Senior Vice President and General Counsel, National Grocers Association

Deborah Weinstein, Director, Family Income Division

Roger Rosenthal, Migrant Legal Action Program

Lynda Fox, Maryland Commissioner of Human Resources

Lynda Mosley, D.C. Department of Human Services

Lois Kauffman, Capital Area Food Bank

Lorraine Matthews, Philadelphia Department of Public Health

Kay Bengston, Lutheran Office for Governmental Affairs

William Hariston, Executive Director, West Virginia Coalition on Food and Nutrition

Derek Miller, Results Educational Fund

Elaine Archangelo, Delaware Health and Social Services

Rachel Ostendorf, Outreach Coordinator, NETWORK, a national Catholic social justice lobby, D.C.

Andrew Rivas, Catholic Charities, USA

(1:07 p.m.)

MS. WATKINS: Good afternoon. I'm Shirley Undersecretary for Food, Nutrition and Consumer and we're delighted to see so many of you here noon. And I know people will be coming and going the afternoon. And this is the first of the Food Stamp Conversations that we will be having country.

And I'd like to take this opportunity to thank all  
expressing, by your mere presence, your interest  
d Stamp Program, our national safety net for food  
t the Department of Agriculture.

We're honored to have with us this afternoon, Secretary Richard Rominger, who will make some remarks. And because of his very busy schedule, he's going to be able to stay all afternoon with us but not here for a portion of the opening session.

Deputy Secretary Rominger?

MR. ROMINGER: Thank you, Shirley.

On behalf of Secretary Glickman and myself, I'm  
to welcome all of you here today for this  
day of conversation and discussion.

We look at these series of National Food Stamp  
ons as a unique and valuable opportunity for those

1 of us who administer the program to get a fresh perspective  
2 on how it serves the millions of families and children all  
3 across this country. As we approach the reauthorization  
4 effort in 2002, it's important to have a clear understanding  
5 of what needs to be done to make the program the best that  
6 it can possibly be.

7           Although most people believe that the Department  
8 of Agriculture is pretty much concerned only with corn and  
9 soybeans or produce or forestry and the like, the programs  
10 of the Food, Nutrition and Consumer Service account for over  
11 60 percent of our budget -- 60 percent.

12           Nutrition assistance is a major priority for this  
13 Department, and we're determined to administer these quality  
14 programs with compassion, with efficiency and integrity.

15           We often have visitors from other countries who  
16 are struck by the comprehensive nature of our nutrition  
17 assistance programs. Although some of these countries may  
18 have similar efforts, I think none are as wide ranging or so  
19 thoroughly devoted to improving the nutritional health of  
20 needy families as those that are run by USDA.

21           I think we have cause for great pride in how well  
22 these programs have worked and how they've become a part of  
23 our national fabric and character. I cannot help but think  
24 that much of the world's hunger could be solved by  
25 governments with the will to develop programs which would

1 care for the least of their citizens as effectively as the  
2 Food Stamp Program.

3 All that having been said, no program is perfect,  
4 even one as admirable as the Food Stamp Program. So we're  
5 holding these conversations so that we can fine-tune,  
6 rethink and reinvigorate this vital part of our nation's  
7 nutrition safety net. So we're counting on you to help us  
8 get this done.

9 So again, welcome, and thank you for your interest  
10 in the Food Stamp Program.

11 (Applause.)

12 MS. WATKINS: Thank you, Deputy Secretary  
13 Rominger. We appreciate your being here because this is a  
14 -- I know one of the things that you value and want to be  
15 sure that we can have a program that's extremely effective  
16 to serve all of the people, the millions of people that we  
17 work with on a daily basis.

18 Well, as the deputy said we're here to listen  
19 today. And while we call it the conversation, rather than a  
20 listening session, both Julie, Chris Martin, the regional  
21 administrator and I will listen to the kinds of things that  
22 you will share with us.

23 But before we get underway, I'd like to spend just  
24 a few minutes describing the purpose and the goals and some  
25 of the next steps and put in perspective the history and the

1 function of the Food Stamp Program. And I realize already  
2 that many of you probably know more about this than I do,  
3 but I think this will kind of help us focus our conversation  
4 today.

5           One of the things that has struck me when I came  
6 to the Department and started getting briefings from all of  
7 the staff was just what the Food Stamp Program is really all  
8 about and why did we start the Food Stamp Program.

9           And it was interesting as one of the staff people  
10 said to me, you know, I just want to tell you that this  
11 program was really established to help people who had some  
12 nutritional needs and we wanted to focus on working poor  
13 people who were having difficulty and were just down on  
14 their luck for the moment and that it didn't last very long.  
15 It was to help them for the short term.

16           And it started as far back as the Depression and  
17 people were having some difficulty. So I'll just read what  
18 the original intent in the Food Stamp Act says was to  
19 strengthen the agricultural economy, achieve a more  
20 effective use of food abundances and to provide for improved  
21 levels of nutrition among low-income households.

22           So the program we know today started out as a  
23 pilot program in 1961 and was made permanent in 1964. And  
24 the program expanded dramatically after 1974 when Congress  
25 required all of the states to make food stamps available to

1 low-income households.

2           And the Food Stamp Act of 1977 made significant  
3 changes in program regulations. It tightened eligibility  
4 criteria and administration and removed the requirement that  
5 food stamps be purchased by recipients.

6           So you see, we've come a long way when people no  
7 longer have to purchase food stamps. But since that time  
8 and up to a point before welfare reform, the program had  
9 grown, dramatically, and reached as many as 28 million  
10 participants. And that was in March of 1994. The current  
11 participation level hovers around 17, 18 and up to 20  
12 million per month.

13           I want to share with you some information we  
14 received in some analysis that was done by our Office of  
15 Analysis and Evaluation that tells you the characteristics  
16 of food stamp households. It's diverse, a wide-ranging  
17 group that represents a broad cross section of the nation's  
18 low-income population, which goes something like this.

19           Over half of the recipients are children. And  
20 another 8 percent are 60 years and older. The other  
21 characteristic is the majority of the households do not  
22 receive TANF benefits. They receive cash assistance from  
23 SSI, the Supplemental Security Income, Social Security and  
24 state general assistance. Nine percent of the people who  
25 participate in the Food Stamp Program have no income of any

1 kind. Twenty-six percent of the recipients work. And for  
2 these households, those earnings are the primary source of  
3 the family income.

4           Only 10 percent of those working families make  
5 enough to put them above the poverty line. And 37 percent  
6 are at or below the poverty line. The average food stamp  
7 household has only \$118 in countable resources, including  
8 vehicles, checking and savings accounts.

9           The average food stamp household is small. Around  
10 2.4. I don't know how they ever characterize that 4 percent  
11 of 2.4. I don't know if that's a leg and a half, or what  
12 that is. And they've tried to explain this, but I still  
13 don't understand it.

14           However, households with children are relatively  
15 large. They average 3.3 members. So the other part of that  
16 family member I guess is over at my house.

17           And then households with elderly participants were  
18 smaller, with an average of 1.3 members.

19           When we hosted the National Nutrition Summit here  
20 a few weeks ago, we had several breakout sessions. Two of  
21 the most well-attended sessions were those that focused on  
22 hunger. And we had an opportunity to listen to a variety of  
23 speakers.

24           But the first session that was entitled "The Face  
25 of Hunger in America" had a couple of speakers that I think



1 brought tears to the eyes of everybody in that room. And  
2 one of those speakers told us that the Food Stamp Program  
3 didn't make her dependent in her family, that it helped her  
4 to succeed.

5 Sharon is now what we call self-sufficient,  
6 self-reliant. She's confident now and she is working. And  
7 she is one of those people that you would characterize as  
8 being successful because of the Food Stamp Program.

9 And I think we've had lots of these discussions,  
10 but as we do, we want to keep her in mind and all of those  
11 words that many of you heard as Sharon spoke to us, that the  
12 food stamp continues to help people become self-sufficient.

13 We're hoping that the suggestions that you provide  
14 for us today, and those that we will hear in the next month  
15 or so, will help us to make these programs even better for  
16 the people that we serve.

17 I know that many of you have seen the guiding  
18 principles, and we perhaps have some out on the table. The  
19 guiding principles of the Food Stamp Program. That helps us  
20 to know that as we work on these programs, we're talking  
21 about improving the nutritional well-being of families so  
22 that we can reduce hunger and improve the nutritional plight  
23 of all the families, the elderly and the children who are on  
24 these programs.

25 The principle is the foundation of the program and

1 nutrition is the very heart of what we originally intended  
2 for this program.

3           As we approach, as the deputy said already,  
4 reauthorization for 2002, it's important that we start  
5 thinking early on how we want this program to look and how  
6 we can be more responsive to the millions of people that we  
7 serve every day.

8           And since we want to get a broad array of input  
9 from a lot of people around the country, we want to make  
10 certain that we have all of the input necessary to make this  
11 the very best program for the American people that -- and  
12 all the families that we serve.

13           We'll be in Atlanta, New York, Chicago, Kansas  
14 City, Los Angeles and Dallas over the next two months.  
15 We're going to be here to listen to you. And again, we  
16 appreciate you being here to participate.

17           If you haven't signed up so we will know when it  
18 is time for you to speak, and if you need to leave, you let  
19 us know and we'll put you next on the program. I know some  
20 of you have some other responsibilities that you'd like to  
21 get on with this afternoon.

22           But we're going to be here until about 7:00 this  
23 evening. And we'll stay here as long as we need to to hear  
24 from all of the people who have some concerns or some  
25 opportunities to share with us that will make this program

1 the very best that it can be.

2 I'd like to now ask Julie Paradis, Deputy  
3 Undersecretary for Food Nutrition and Consumer Services, who  
4 will give you some more information on the logistics and how  
5 we'll manage this afternoon.

6 And thank you again so much for being here to  
7 share with us and we'll be here to listen to you.

8 MS. PARADIS: Thank you, Shirley.

9 Let me just say, I started working as many of you  
10 may know -- a lot of familiar faces out in the audience,  
11 although I'm thrilled to see a lot of faces that are not  
12 familiar to me -- but I started working with the Food Stamp  
13 Program back in 1979. And so for me, this is a truly  
14 historic occasion and could not have happened were it not  
15 for the leadership of Shirley Watkins and the Deputy  
16 Secretary, Rich Rominger, and Secretary Glickman, President  
17 Clinton and Vice President Gore. It's a real honor and a  
18 and privilege for me to be working with these people who  
19 care so passionately and deeply about America's low-income  
20 families. And it's very exciting that we're kicking off  
21 today the first of seven of these conversations around the  
22 country.

23 By the end of this summer, I think all of us will  
24 be in better shape to really understand what it is we need  
25 to do to improve upon our premier nutrition assistance

1 safety net program.

2           So it's a personal thrill for me to welcome you  
3 all here today. And I'm very excited to hear the comments  
4 of all of you through the afternoon.

5           As you probably know, each of you who wants to  
6 speak has to sort of sign up in order, and that's how we'll  
7 take you. We don't have a time limit in terms of how long  
8 each of you can speak, but if we sense that, you know,  
9 things are dragging a little and we need to get moving, we  
10 may give you a high sign and ask you to kind of move your  
11 remarks along.

12           Let me remind you if you would prefer to submit  
13 comments in writing, you can certainly do that. We're going  
14 to keep the comment period open until August 31st. And I'm  
15 told that in your materials that you got as you entered, it  
16 tells you the various ways that you can submit your comments  
17 in writing.

18           And so I think we're ready for our first speaker.  
19 Let me again welcome all of you here this afternoon.  
20 Please stay as long as you can to hear all the comments, but  
21 I know people will be drifting in and out.

22           And I do want to let you know that when all is  
23 said and done this coming fall, we will have a piece that we  
24 will have available to the public that will try to capture  
25 in some coherent way the remarks made by everyone over the

1 course of the summer.

2           So again, welcome, and we're ready for speaker  
3 number one.

4           Okay, we do -- let me -- yeah, the mike is in the  
5 middle of the room, so go right to that mike and we do have  
6 a court reporter, so we will be transcribing every word said  
7 here through the course of the day. And as you begin your  
8 remarks, if you would give us your name. And if you're with  
9 an organization, let us know what that organization is.

10           Thank you.

11           MR. CLAUSER: Good afternoon, my name is Jack  
12 Clauser. I'm from Pennsylvania and I'm in the food stamp  
13 policy unit.

14           Thank you for the opportunity to express some of  
15 the ideas that Pennsylvania would like considered in the  
16 next reauthorization of the Food Stamp Program. Working in  
17 the food stamp policy unit since 1982, I personally  
18 experienced many changes in the program over the years.

19           We've mumbled among ourselves in the unit many  
20 times, why isn't this program simpler and more flexible?  
21 Let me explain.

22           The passage of PERORA (phonetic) was a milestone  
23 in the welfare reform in Pennsylvania and the rest of the  
24 country. Pennsylvania, like other states, has placed an  
25 emphasis on welfare-to-work, independence and self-

1 sufficiency. What was missing from non-assistance food  
2 stamps was a flexibility to match our TANF program  
3 regulations.

4           To attain self-sufficiency, one needs to work and  
5 work requires reliable transportation. We would like the  
6 same vehicle exclusions available in TANF applicable in the  
7 Food Stamp Program.

8           This solves two problems. It aligns two programs  
9 up for simplicity and it gets people to work.

10           Two of our labor-intensive provisions of PERORA  
11 were the ABOD (phonetic) and the noncitizen regulations. We  
12 would like the ABOD provision eliminated. However, if this  
13 is not likely, we request that the ABOD requirements be  
14 modified so that there is no time limit in benefits as long  
15 the client is complying with any plan established by the  
16 employment and training case manager or working but not  
17 meeting the 20-hour weekly work requirement.

18           Additionally, we would like noncitizen provisions  
19 modified to remove the time limits for all noncitizens  
20 lawfully admitted for permanent residency.

21           The INS process for permanent residency should be  
22 sufficient to relieve the state of checking for criminal  
23 history.

24           We also noted that the definition of elderly for  
25 citizens and noncitizens needs to be standardized. Citizens

1 are elderly at age 60. And noncitizens under the Balanced  
2 Budget Act are eligible at 65. Match these definitions to  
3 reduce confusion in the field.

4           Some eligibility standards are antiquated. We  
5 believe that the allotment benefit table formula needs to be  
6 reviewed and updated based on current price situations. We  
7 also request that only a gross income test based on the  
8 federal poverty income guidelines level and eliminate the  
9 net income test.

10           Further, we request eliminating the deductions and  
11 give a flat benefit based on gross income and family size.

12           As an alternative, make the shelter and standard  
13 utility allowance one standard deduction.

14           Another eligibility standard that needs to be  
15 changed, in our opinion, is household composition. Children  
16 age 17 and under should remain part of the mandatory  
17 household. However, married or emancipated children,  
18 regardless of age, returning to their parents' household,  
19 should not be required mandatory household members.

20           Further, we would also like to eliminate food  
21 stamp eligibility for post-high school students except those  
22 who are working or exempt from the work requirements.  
23 Excess income not used for educational purposes should be  
24 counted as available to students and their dependents.

25           Additionally, an individual subject to domestic

1 violence must go to a certified shelter to receive duplicate  
2 food benefits, food stamp benefits for the month they have  
3 left the household. This sometimes precludes getting to the  
4 safest and closest place, which might mean family or  
5 friends.

6           Being a rural state, shelters are not available in  
7 every county. We would like to extend the duplicate benefit  
8 exception to all domestic violence situations, not just  
9 individuals in certified shelters.

10           The emphasis placed on the Adoption and Safe  
11 Families Act of 1997, Public Law 105-89, resulted in a  
12 negative impact from the household food stamp benefits.

13           Under PERORA's mandatory household provision, once  
14 these special needs children are adopted by their foster  
15 parents, the children must be considered mandatory household  
16 members. In the adoption cases brought to our attention,  
17 families lost their food stamp eligibility.

18           The Food Stamp Program needs the flexibility to  
19 support public laws that will provide consistency for the  
20 population.

21           The last idea I'd like to address is tolerance and  
22 quality control errors. The error of tolerance for each  
23 employed client should be no less than \$100. Furthermore,  
24 whenever new policy is implemented, the state should be held  
25 harmless for a longer period of time. Preferably a year,



1 with the emphasis placed on employment.

2           And lastly, underissuances and overissuances  
3 corrected should not be considered in the state quality  
4 control error rate.

5           In summation, we seek: match the vehicle exclusion  
6 with TANF, eliminate the ABOD regulations, restore  
7 eligibility for all noncitizens who have permanent resident  
8 status, match the definition for elderly for citizens and  
9 noncitizens, update the allotment formula calculations,  
10 eliminate the net test and deductions with the benefits  
11 based on gross income and household size, allow married or  
12 emancipated children under age 22 to set up separate  
13 households when living with parents, eliminate post-high  
14 school students special income exceptions, expand the  
15 duplicate benefit provisions for domestic violence victims,  
16 expand the Adoption and Safe Families Act option for foster  
17 parents who have adopted their foster children and carry  
18 this flexibility-supportive idea to other new laws, increase  
19 the quality control error and tolerance to \$100 for employed  
20 individuals with longer hold-harmless periods and stop  
21 counting corrected underissuances, overissuances in the  
22 state quality control error rate.

23           Pennsylvania is looking for a simplified program  
24 with flexibility. By talking and working together, we can  
25 make changes for a better Food Stamp Program.

1 MS. WATKINS: Thanks, Jack.

2 The next is Len Perry. If you would talk into the  
3 mike -- I think people might have been having a little  
4 difficulty. So if you could just speak into your mike,  
5 please.

6 MR. PERRY: I certainly will try.

7 MS. WATKINS: Thank you.

8 MR. PERRY: Good afternoon. My name is Len Perry.  
9 With me today are Shawn Massey and Demita Hickman. Ms.  
10 Massey, Ms. Hickman and I work for the Prince George's  
11 Family Investment Administration, formerly known as Social  
12 Services, in Maryland.

13 Amongst its missions is the determination of food  
14 stamp eligibility of customers seeking assistance in our  
15 geographic jurisdiction. We are pleased to appear before  
16 the Food and Nutrition Service and welcome this opportunity  
17 to share some of impressions gained in the Food Stamp  
18 Program.

19 I think I can safely speak for the three of us  
20 when I say that from its very inception, this federal  
21 initiative has more than proven its worth in ensuring that  
22 countless deserving people have been able to avail  
23 themselves and their families of balanced, nutritious meals  
24 during times of demonstrated financial hardship.

25 This program is tangible and meaningful expression

1 of the compassion that we, as a people, are blessed with as  
2 a character trait. On the eve of its reauthorization  
3 consideration by Congress, we add our voices to the chorus  
4 of many seeking its extension.

5           However, as a former case manager and now a  
6 reviewer in the food stamp payment accuracy unit, I must  
7 admit to having a wish list of sorts of changes I think  
8 should be considered during the reauthorization process.

9           For instance, the state of Maryland, Virginia and  
10 the District of Columbia all border each other. There's an  
11 element of mobility to the population we serve. We need to  
12 be able to determine whether a given applicant coming  
13 through our doors is or was recently employed with the  
14 federal government. Employed. That is all. No other  
15 particulars are needed. We can proceed from there.

16           The same holds true for people who have recently  
17 moved from Virginia to our jurisdiction. While our agency  
18 can now access some data from the District of Columbia, it  
19 is limited in scope and accessibility. For instance, we  
20 cannot now readily determine receipt or nonreceipt of court-  
21 mandated child support.

22           As for Virginia, we must also rely on the  
23 cooperation of the customer to determine receipt of child  
24 support and must jump through some hurdles to access wage  
25 information. It would be extremely helpful if these

1 impediments were removed and cross-jurisdiction data sharing  
2 the order of the day.

3           On to a different concern. Staff often chafes  
4 about the complexity of alien and legal, lawful legal  
5 resident alien food stamp policy. Many think these -- many  
6 think policy in these areas should be revisited with the  
7 idea of simplifying it if at all possible. We should strive  
8 to always keep in mind the basic premise of this program,  
9 that being to help people in need.

10           The gentleman who preceded me also spoke to  
11 vehicles. This is another issue we would like to bring up.  
12 It's my understanding that a policy change is imminent, but  
13 if what I've heard is true, the change comes with a mixed  
14 blessing.

15           Again, simplification and an eye on whether  
16 genuine need is demonstrated should be paramount. After  
17 all, cars as assets cannot be so readily converted into  
18 cash, relative to the immediacy of the applicant's need.

19           You have to pardon me a bit, I have to jump back  
20 to immigrant applicants, as well. Some in the agency have  
21 voiced a view that ineligible immigrant income in the  
22 household should be treated much like that of ordinary  
23 citizens with incomes seeking assistance.

24           While I certainly do not know all the policy  
25 considerations underlying this, I suggest that perhaps an

1 equity concern appears here and maybe it warrants looking  
2 into.

3           Finally, I share with my co-workers the concern  
4 for more equitable treatment of seniors and the disabled.  
5 On more than just a few occasions, I have encountered  
6 situations where such people are only eligible for the  
7 minimum monthly benefit amount. Perhaps pushing up the  
8 shelter deduction will result in them being able to purchase  
9 more by way of needy foodstuffs.

10           These are a few of the more important concerns  
11 that I'd like to bring to your attention. It bears  
12 reiterating that this is a good and much-needed program, but  
13 as in any program, occasional adjustments may need to be  
14 considered from time to time.

15           Thank you.

16           MS. WATKINS: Thank you, Mr. Perry.

17           The next speaker is John Robinson. Mr. Robinson.

18           MR. ROBINSON: Good evening. My name is John  
19 Robinson, director of the Martin Luther King Center in  
20 Arlington, Virginia.

21           I've been there 35 years and I've seen poverty at  
22 its worse in the northern Virginia area. Food stamps is a  
23 good program, but I've seen too much abuse from poor people.

24           We see that our seniors are not being taken care  
25 of properly in Arlington because of the high costs of rents

1 in that area of Arlington, Alexandria and Fairfax. Many  
2 people have called us over the years saying that they are  
3 hungry, and we have to give them food. We go to their  
4 houses and we see that they have eaten sardines and crackers  
5 because they cannot afford proper food.

6           Every day when I go out to get coffee at  
7 McDonald's or 7-11, you see a lot of white seniors and  
8 blacks or Hispanics, they're eating because it's cheaper to  
9 eat at McDonald's. And that food is not really good for us.

10           And so I would like to see a better program for  
11 our seniors, to lower the requirement so more could get.

12           Now, what we do in Virginia, a lot of times, drug  
13 addicts get more food stamps than a senior. And many times,  
14 the drug addicts, AIDS victims, will take their food stamps  
15 and sell them. Now, I know Virginia has not come into the  
16 20th century yet with the card system like Maryland. I feel  
17 the Department of Agriculture should really put pressure on  
18 Virginia to hurry up and get that card system. That would  
19 cut out some of the fraud.

20           When I -- I'm at the center constantly, 24 hours a  
21 day, seven days a week. And after the first of the month, I  
22 see addicts and people that are still on welfare bring them  
23 down to the corners and they sell them to people.

24           And then you go into the convenience stores, not  
25 7-11, but other stores where they will sell them. And

1 they're not supposed to, but it still goes on.

2           And so I would like to see a tightening up of  
3 giving it to the young people and to make sure that they  
4 don't take those stamps and abuse them and sell them so that  
5 they can go across town into D.C. to get their heroin or the  
6 crack.

7           Our children are in trouble in northern Virginia.  
8   So many of them are because they don't get proper food.  
9 Now, I heard on the news the other day that we're getting  
10 too fat and we need to go to see Jenny Craig. But many  
11 times, mothers today are more lazy than they were when my  
12 mother came up. She worked from sunup till sundown and  
13 still came home and cooked. She didn't have the modern  
14 kitchen like the women have today where they can push a  
15 button or put a microwave. Everybody's in a hurry.

16           So many of our children do not eat properly. And  
17 then there's a lot of red tape. A lot of people will go to  
18 the Department of Human Services in Arlington or in the  
19 northern Virginia area to get food stamps, but it's  
20 embarrassing to them, the red tape that they have to go  
21 through to get them.

22           So I think we need to cut that.

23           Also, we can spend -- we're going to spend \$10  
24 million to bring pandas over here to the zoo and many of our  
25 people in America are starving.

1           Now, I know that the federal government is not  
2 going to pay all the money. Some contributions is going to  
3 be given for those pandas, but I think we need to take care  
4 children and seniors in this country. We have AIDS victims  
5 that are dying and don't have proper food, and we really  
6 need to look at that.

7           Also, social workers will have to get on the ball.  
8 And they are going to have to get out into these homes and  
9 see that these people are eating properly and also to set up  
10 nutritional programs within the local community to teach  
11 women and men how to cook. Because we shouldn't have to go  
12 to McDonald's and Burger King all the time to buy food and  
13 stuff.

14           So in closing, I would like to see a better  
15 program for Virginia and to make sure that Virginia hurries  
16 up and gets the card system going.

17           Thank you.

18           MS. WATKINS: Thank you, Mr. Robinson.

19           Jim, if you don't mind, we have someone may come  
20 just before you, if that's okay.

21           MR. ROMINGER: I'd like to welcome Congresswoman  
22 Eva Clayton to the conversation here this afternoon from  
23 North Carolina. We'd like to have you say a few words if  
24 you would like.

25           CONGRESSWOMAN CLAYTON: Thank you, Mr. Secretary,



1 and I will say a few words, and I'm delighted to see such a  
2 large group, and thank you, Secretary Watkins for the  
3 invitation.

4 I am indeed pleased to join with all of our  
5 friends, friends who care about this issue, and certainly  
6 I'm pleased to acknowledge the fine work that Secretary  
7 Shirley Watkins is doing, that is, to talk with you and  
8 other Americans who care about this issue.

9 I want to talk about this issue that many  
10 Americans would prefer to ignore because they would like to  
11 think there is not a problem. The economy is soaring for  
12 some, but it is shrinking far too much for many others,  
13 especially those who are hungry.

14 There's evidence of hunger in 3.6 percent of all  
15 households in America. Close to 4 million children are  
16 hungry. Fourteen million children, 20 percent of the  
17 population of children, live in food-insecure homes. In  
18 food-insecure homes, meals are skipped or the size of meals  
19 is indeed reduced.

20 More than 10 percent of all household Americans  
21 are food insecure, the recent report said. Because there is  
22 such hunger, or food insecurity, there's also infant  
23 mortality, growing stunting, iron deficiency, anemia, poor  
24 learning and increased chances of disease.

25 Because there's such hunger and food insecurity,

1 the poor are more likely to remain poor, the hungry more  
2 likely to remain hungry.

3           It seems strange that we should be fighting for  
4 food for those who cannot fight for themselves. It is  
5 really -- it is time to stop picking on the poor. Less than  
6 3 percent of our budget goes to feed the hungry. It is for  
7 those reasons that we should and we must pass the hunger  
8 relief legislation. We need your help out there. Indeed,  
9 you need to tell your congresspersons that that needs to  
10 happen.

11           If we do, we will achieve several important goals.  
12 We will build on the bipartisan progress we made in 1998  
13 with the passage of the Agriculture Research Act. In that  
14 act, we restored some benefits for legal immigrants.

15           In the legislation I have cosponsored in this  
16 Congress, we restore food stamp benefits for all immigrants,  
17 including working poor families with young children and  
18 needy seniors. With the Hunger Relief Act of 1999, we will  
19 also seek to update the food stamp rules. We will change  
20 the vehicle limits that many of you have been fighting for  
21 so families can retain a reliable car without losing their  
22 food benefits.

23           We will change the shelter cap, raising it from  
24 \$275 to \$340 over next four years. And then we would index  
25 it to inflation.

1           These are simple measures, but they will make a  
2 difference for the poor.

3           And finally, the Hunger Relief Act authorized  
4 another \$100 million over five years for commodity purchases  
5 and food distribution. With this, with the will we can do  
6 it. Without the will and without your help, we will not do  
7 it.

8           With the support of those who are assembled and  
9 all of your friends, I hope you will help us in Congress to  
10 pass this bill.

11           We cannot, however, move from poverty to progress  
12 without a fair chance for all. This is what this about. We  
13 cannot prepare our children for the future if we insist upon  
14 policies that relegate them to the past. We cannot ensure a  
15 good quality of life for all if we refuse to provide  
16 programs for some of our citizens. And we cannot protect  
17 and reserve our communities if we do not adequately provide  
18 basic commodity for living, something to eat.

19           Nutrition programs are essential to the well-being  
20 of millions of our citizens, the disadvantaged, our  
21 children, the elderly and the disabled. These are groups of  
22 people who often cannot provide for themselves and need help  
23 for their existence. I'm delighted you are there to  
24 champion.

25           They do not ask for much. They just ask for a

1 little help to sustain them through the day. Just a little  
2 help to keep children alert in class, to help adults to be  
3 productive in their jobs, also to help to search, so they'll  
4 be able to search for a job.

5           The Hunger Relief Act from 1999 provides that  
6 help. I'm asking you for your assistance in having that  
7 pass in Congress. Thank you very much.

8           MR. WEILL: Good afternoon, I'm Jim Weill from the  
9 Food Research and Action Center. I thank USDA  
10 representative Clayton, Deputy Secretary and the  
11 Undersecretary for holding these hearings, being here today.

12           Food stamps are a critically important program and  
13 we're obviously at an extremely important juncture in the  
14 program. I'm going to talk a good bit about some of the  
15 problems in the program and how to fix them, but I want to  
16 begin by talking about the strengths of the program.

17           There is considerably less hunger in this country  
18 than there was before the Food Stamp Program moved to scale  
19 in the early and mid-1970s. Hunger is down, even though the  
20 cash income of the bottom two-fifths of Americans,  
21 especially families with children and especially young and  
22 minority families, are, in fact, lower than they were in the  
23 early 1970s.

24           Their earnings are down, median earnings are down  
25 and welfare payments, public assistance payments are way

1 down. So in other words, except for seniors, the reason  
2 that there's less hunger in America today than there was in  
3 the early 1970s is not because low-income and moderate-  
4 income families have more income from earnings and public  
5 assistance -- in fact, the child poverty rate is a third  
6 higher than it was then -- but it's mainly because families  
7 are now getting food stamps and the Earned Income Tax  
8 Credit.

9           So the starting place in any discussion of the  
10 Food Stamp Program is that the program has been very  
11 successful -- certainly not an unqualified success, and  
12 you're going to be hearing a lot about that from all of the  
13 speakers -- but very successful in reducing hunger and  
14 undernutrition and food insecurity in America, and the  
15 resulting downstream health and developmental education and  
16 other effects of hunger and food insecurity.

17           Standing alone, food stamps can't end hunger in  
18 this country. But there's no doubt that weakening the  
19 program will increase hunger even in a strong economy. In  
20 fact, that's the lesson we've learned in the last few years:  
21 when we've had economic growth but weakening of the program,  
22 it has led to persistent and, in some cases, increasing  
23 hunger.

24           And I also would just mention as an aside that  
25 while we all hope that economic growth will continue

1 forever, the Food Stamp Program is even more necessary if  
2 and when we ever face national or state recessions or  
3 emergencies.

4           So we need to have a strong and national nutrition  
5 safety net. And the Food Stamp Program has proven that for  
6 30 years. But despite the successes of the program, we  
7 still as Representative Clayton indicated, have 31 million  
8 Americans who are hungry or food insecure.

9           Food insecurity is a sometimes sterile phrase that  
10 includes real damage to families -- parents who are skipping  
11 meals so their children can have enough to eat, or families  
12 that have enough to eat but can't afford a balanced diet.

13           Of the 31 million, 12 million are children.  
14 Children are more likely to be hungry and food insecure than  
15 are adults. So we need to strengthen the program and we  
16 have to strengthen both access and the adequacy of benefits.  
17 I'm going to start with adequacy.

18           We now have a gross domestic product of \$9  
19 trillion and a federal budget surplus this year of more than  
20 \$200 billion. Yet the maximum allotment in food stamps,  
21 based on the Thrifty Food Plan, is so meager that USDA  
22 itself has said that at least -- that at best, only one in  
23 10 families spending that amount on food can receive 100  
24 percent of the recommended daily allotments of the basic  
25 nutrients.

1 Recipients routinely report to the Department, to  
2 the states, to us, to advocates around the country that food  
3 stamps run out in the third week of the month. We need to  
4 address benefit adequacy in reauthorization.

5 There were a number of key approaches to doing  
6 that. The most important one, of course, is moving from  
7 Thrifty to a more adequate standard for the benefits. But  
8 we also have to improve the shelter deductions and the  
9 earning deduction, and we have to raise the \$10 minimum  
10 benefit so that seniors and others receiving the minimum  
11 benefit will have greater incentives to come to the program  
12 and obtain more adequate assistance.

13 The other thing we have to do is improve access to  
14 the program. You all know that there's been a dramatic  
15 drop, about a third, in the number of people participating  
16 in the program in the last four years. I won't go into the  
17 detail, but we'll submit for the record, some detail on  
18 that, including the state numbers. And those can also be  
19 found, as a little commercial aside, on the FRAC Web site at  
20 [www.frac.org](http://www.frac.org).

21 The drop in the case load is in large part, not  
22 totally, but in large part because the program is set up in  
23 a way that has made the easy path into food stamps, as well  
24 as Medicaid, the path that goes through cash assistance.

25 Now, as the states and the federal government are

1 pushing people away from cash, at worst, states are also  
2 deliberating pushing people away from food stamps and  
3 Medicaid. And at best, the states do not yet have a culture  
4 and don't have the framework, either the state framework or  
5 an adequate federal framework, that makes it easy to get  
6 food stamps and Medicaid also without cash assistance to  
7 working families and others.

8           If the goals of the '96 welfare law were to  
9 support work, reduce poverty and strengthen families, the  
10 ways in which we're making it hard or impossible for low-  
11 income working families to get supportive benefits, in fact  
12 discourage work, weaken families and perpetuate or deepen  
13 poverty.

14           So the program has to be open to those in need.  
15 The states and cities and counties have to do a far better  
16 job of outreach, of serving those with language problems, of  
17 helping families that are leaving cash assistance for any  
18 reason or being diverted from cash assistance, obtain  
19 benefits and understand that they're still eligible for  
20 benefits if they're low income. FRAC would also support a  
21 transitional benefit for those leaving cash assistance or  
22 entering work.

23           The states and counties also have to have  
24 reasonable certification periods for working families, more  
25 accessible hours and locations in the short run and in the



1 medium run. Presumably we'll be heading toward  
2 outstationing and on-line applications for working families  
3 and others.

4           And they have to have more accessible and simpler  
5 application forms, simpler systems just to report changes by  
6 mail, phone, fax and e-mail. And we also need to change  
7 certain categorical rules that exclude those who are poor,  
8 hungry, but are now categorically excluded. That includes  
9 many of the groups that were mentioned by the representative  
10 from Pennsylvania. The ABODs, the jobless, childless adults  
11 have to be brought back into the program. All legal  
12 immigrants who need food stamps should be in the program.  
13 Those with modest assets.

14           And I would add to that list, people convicted of  
15 drug felonies in the past who are excluded from life -- for  
16 life from TANF and from food stamps by the bizarre and  
17 self-defeating provision of the '96 law, a little-known  
18 provision that's going to have more and more dramatic impact  
19 over the years as more people are thrown out of the program  
20 because of it.

21           Some of these changes -- many of these changes  
22 will have to wait for reauthorization. All certainly could  
23 be done now, given the amounts of the surpluses and the way  
24 the economy's going, but we recognize the political and  
25 practical limitations.

1 But there are a number that even in the most  
2 limited political and practical sense can be done now. And  
3 I want to talk briefly about some of those. Because we  
4 think that acting now in certain key ways will strengthen  
5 the reauthorization process in 2002.

6 Representative Clayton mentioned the  
7 Kennedy-Specter Hunger Relief Act, the HRA, which has broad  
8 bipartisan and grassroots support. Has 120 co-sponsors in  
9 the House, more than 1,200 groups around the nation have  
10 endorsed it. It addresses the vehicle rule and the shelter  
11 allowance, the immigrant issues, some other issues and  
12 should be passed this year.

13 The same is true with the Graham-Coyne-Levin Food  
14 Stamp Outreach for Kids Act, the Fork Act, which would  
15 provide grants for innovated outreach activities by the  
16 states and enhance USDA's monitoring of local offices'  
17 procedures and practices and address the access barriers.

18 We also support the initiative USDA has taken to  
19 begin to modernize and make sense of the incentives and  
20 disincentives in the quality control system. And a lot more  
21 has to be done on quality control. We're going to need  
22 comprehensive measures that include questions in quality  
23 control of whether the state is serving those in need,  
24 rather than giving all the weight or most of the weight to  
25 the current system of measuring off in errors -- in tiny

1 and, in many cases, unavoidable for working families, tiny  
2 mistakes and payment accuracy.

3           The current quality control system harms states  
4 and poor people alike. And it's not, frankly, doing the  
5 taxpayers any favors, either. We also need in the short  
6 term to maintain the procedural protections that do help  
7 applicants and recipients, those who are less educated or  
8 have language problems.

9           The program needs to be simplified in ways that  
10 make it easier for poor people, low-income people who need  
11 benefits to get benefits. But things are not more simple if  
12 you're poor and can't get food stamps. That's not  
13 simplification.

14           So we underscore the comments we submitted on the  
15 February 29th proposed regulations.

16           And the last short-term point I'd make in the  
17 period leading up to reauthorization, is the need for the  
18 President, the Secretary, the Undersecretary and others to  
19 continue what you've been doing in the last two years, which  
20 is wonderful. To speak out for the program, for its  
21 importance in supporting work and nutrition, especially  
22 among children, and for its antipoverty effects.

23           At the same time you're making needed changes to  
24 strengthen the program, we also have to strengthen the  
25 program by telling people in the media and policymakers how

1 strong and important it already is.

2           With these changes and initiatives in the short  
3 term we'll be in better shape going into reauthorization.  
4 We'll be better able to take the steps on access and  
5 adequacy that need to be taken to build on a continued  
6 federal entitlement, federal nutrition safety net, a strong  
7 Food Stamp Program.

8           Finally, the last point I'd make is that the  
9 President and the Vice President, the Secretary, Senators  
10 Dole and McGovern and the other plenary speakers at the  
11 summit last month, the National Nutrition Summit, all spoke  
12 about the great progress we've made against hunger in the  
13 last 30 years. And all spoke about the absolute necessity  
14 of finishing the job, ending hunger in this extraordinarily  
15 wealthy and abundant country. We're not going to be able to  
16 do that without a strong and continuing national Food Stamp  
17 Program.

18           Thank you again for the listening sessions and all  
19 the efforts you've made recently to deal with these  
20 problems, all the initiatives. And we look forward to  
21 continuing to work with you and the other stakeholders to  
22 get the best possible reauthorization in 2002.

23           MS. WATKINS: Jim, thank you very much.

24           I want to take this opportunity to thank FRAC for  
25 all the support and hard work that you've done in helping us

1 to make sure that these conversations are successful around  
2 the country.

3           So we want to thank you and we appreciate all of  
4 the hard work that you've done in helping us to make this  
5 possible.

6           Thank you.

7           Shawn Massey? Ms. Massey is from Prince George's  
8 County, Maryland.

9           MS. MASSEY: I'm here with Mr. Perry, and I would  
10 like to talk about being on both sides of the face of food  
11 stamps. I received at one point and now work for the  
12 Department of Social Services.

13           And I would like -- my first topic I would like to  
14 speak about on how it has helped me to get where I am right  
15 now.

16           The Food Stamp Program has changed my life in the  
17 way that it has helped me through the toughest times as far  
18 as financially. It has helped my family to budget better as  
19 far as buying food and knowing what foods to buy and the  
20 right foods to buy and how to purchase food. It has helped  
21 me nutritionwise on knowing what to buy and what not to buy.

22           The other topic I would like to speak about is how  
23 I could help the change the Food Stamp Program to things I  
24 would like to see in the next couple of years.

25           I would like to see the Food Stamp Program change

1 by accepting the EBT cards, which are the electronic benefit  
2 transaction cards at local department stores, such as the  
3 big K-Marts that have grocery aisles in them. Wal-Mart,  
4 which have the same thing. B.J.'s Wholesale, as well as  
5 Sam's Club and Cosco's.

6           Those places sell food items that are in bulk,  
7 which when you buy in bulk, you save more money in bulk than  
8 you do if you buy at a regular grocery store.

9           In this, I would like to -- you know, most of us  
10 that have received benefits or are receiving benefits, when  
11 you go shopping, you have children, you do not want to jump  
12 from store to store. And if you're already somewhere  
13 purchasing clothing and there's a grocery aisle there that  
14 you can purchase groceries, it's less hassle to jump from  
15 one store to the next when you can do it all in the same  
16 place.

17           Dealing with today's fast-paced world, especially  
18 when you work full time, there's no time to get anything  
19 done with children at hand.

20           Another change I would like to suggest is that  
21 each person receiving food stamps attend a nutrition program  
22 class and finish it where they'll know what to buy and what  
23 not to buy. And they'll know how to buy groceries and feed  
24 their family, where they will not lack as far as nutrition.

25           And I also would like to see most apartments hand

1 out brochures and have a suggestion box located in each  
2 center.

3 I also would like to close with the statement that  
4 the needs of the many outweigh the needs of the one.

5 MS. WATKINS: Thank you very much, Ms. Massey.

6 Our next speaker is Kimberly Pendergrast. Ms.  
7 Pendergrast?

8 MS. PENDERGAST: Thank you very much. My name is  
9 Kim Pendergast and I represent America's Second Harvest, a  
10 network of food banks across the country.

11 I want to thank you for having us here today and  
12 for conducting listening sessions across the country.

13 America's Second Harvest is the largest private  
14 hunger relief organization in the nation with over 200 food  
15 banks and food recovery organizations that serve the many  
16 low-income men and women and families and children in our  
17 nation who may or may not be recipients of food stamps and  
18 who are in need of food and nutrition assistance.

19 Our food banks and food recovery organizations are  
20 experiencing increased demand by these low-income Americans  
21 for emergency food assistance. Despite the decline in  
22 participation in the Food Stamp Program over the past  
23 several years, the need for food and nutrition assistance is  
24 high.

25 America's Second Harvest feels that there are two

1 ways to approach the food stamp reauthorization program.

2 The first is to make several minor but very important  
3 changes to the program. We at America's Second Harvest  
4 strongly support the Hunger Relief Act and the Fork Act  
5 which are before Congress at this time, which would make  
6 strong first strides in raising the vehicle asset limit,  
7 increasing access for legal immigrants, as well as  
8 supporting outreach and monitoring activities.

9           However, just as in 1977, there were fundamental  
10 changes made to the Food Stamp Program. We feel that the  
11 time is now to make fundamental changes to the program to  
12 both increase the adequacy of food stamp benefits, as well  
13 as improving access to the program.

14           Some of the ways that we would propose to do these  
15 things would be to increase the maximum income level from  
16 130 to 150 percent of the federal poverty guidelines; to  
17 increase asset resource levels to \$5,000 for families, to  
18 exempt one vehicle for each family; to eliminate ABOD work  
19 requirements, allow improved immigrant access -- access for  
20 immigrants, legal immigrants; and finally, but most  
21 importantly, to change the base calculation from the Thrifty  
22 Food Plan to the low or moderate food plan.

23           Trends in the market, in the grocery market are  
24 moving towards prepared foods. We find in our own lives  
25 that we have less time available for preparing food. We



1 find that people that come to the food banks are looking  
2 more and more towards prepared foods for their families, and  
3 we should afford this same luxury to food stamp participants  
4 to have the convenience of foods that they are seeing in the  
5 marketplace and the same types of convenience that they need  
6 to be able to work and to raise a family.

7           We also feel that simplifying the process is going  
8 to be imperative, and we need to re-evaluate and use  
9 standard deductions for all applicants for monthly expenses  
10 and create standard deductions for medical expenses. While  
11 allowing individual deductions are aimed at increasing the  
12 benefits provided and increasing the equity in the Food  
13 Stamp Program, verification from deductions can make the  
14 application process cumbersome and very lengthy.

15           Our research has shown that the average food stamp  
16 application is 12 pages long with many pages of verification  
17 requirements for applicants. And applicants need to go to  
18 food stamp offices several times to bring in all of the  
19 required verification information.

20           Simplifying the food stamp application process by  
21 eliminating some of the deductions and using standard  
22 deductions would improve this process and increase the  
23 flexibility.

24           We also support increasing access to the  
25 application process by establishing evening hours in food

1 stamp offices, as well as outsourcing food stamp application  
2 process.

3           In summary, America's Second Harvest and our  
4 network of food banks support making fundamental changes to  
5 the Food Stamp Program, to simplify the application process,  
6 increase the benefit provisions and allow greater access to  
7 the program to families who have a few, but inadequate  
8 resources, low income and a vehicle value too low to be  
9 self-sufficient.

10           We look forward to working closely with USDA and  
11 our allies in the nonprofit community to improve the Food  
12 Stamp Program for low-income Americans.

13           Thank you very much.

14           MS. WATKINS: Thank you.

15           Ray Campbell. Mr. Campbell?

16           MR. CAMPBELL: Good afternoon. My name is Ray  
17 Campbell and I manage the Division of Payment Integrity in  
18 the Baltimore City Department of Social Services.

19           I've been involved in various aspects of the Food  
20 Stamp Program for the last 27 years, all the way back when  
21 you used to have to buy food stamp coupons.

22           I began in food stamp issuance and accounting and  
23 have experience in eligibility determination, overpayment  
24 calculation, fraud prosecution. And more recently, doing  
25 food stamp trafficking prosecution.

1 I appreciate being invited to come and share my  
2 views and I've always been in support of the program goals  
3 and objectives, but that doesn't mean it can't be improved.

4 The three areas I'd like to talk about is program  
5 simplification, disqualification and food stamp trafficking.

6 In program simplification, I don't mean to beat a  
7 dead horse, but I also wanted to talk about either  
8 eliminating or increasing the automobile resource limit.  
9 Way back when, when I started in the program, the resource  
10 limit hasn't changed since then, but the price for  
11 automobiles has gone up about six times. So I think we're  
12 way behind the times in raising that resource limit.

13 The calculation of the resource limit is error-  
14 prone and it's time-consuming.

15 The standard utility allowance and limited utility  
16 allowance is error-prone. I think it should be eliminated  
17 and use something that's simpler. Something like a  
18 percentage deduction of expenses, or something like that.

19 And disqualifications, as you probably know,  
20 Maryland leads the nation in the number of disqualifications  
21 of food stamp tracking, trafficking customers. So we're  
22 starting to come upon quite a few customers who are  
23 permanently disqualified from the program. However, being  
24 permanently disqualified as an individual doesn't prohibit  
25 you from still participating in the program.

1           While it's expected that a person who is  
2 disqualified would get a representative payee for the  
3 remaining household members, the current regulations don't  
4 require that you do it. And if they don't come up with a  
5 representative payee, we have to let the permanently  
6 disqualified person continue to receive benefits for the  
7 household. And we're seeing quite a bit of clients who are  
8 already permanently disqualified continuing to sell their  
9 food stamps. And there's nothing we can do about it.

10           Third, food stamp trafficking. Everyone knows  
11 that food stamp trafficking is a serious misuse of food  
12 stamps and a major program-integrity issue. And I think  
13 it's a lot more of a problem in big cities than it is in  
14 other parts of the country. Baltimore City is seeing -- has  
15 quite a problem with food stamp trafficking.

16           And I know you're having problems getting other  
17 states to pursue trafficking investigations. And the main  
18 reason for that is the same problem I have in getting  
19 funding every year. Because it's not a mandated program and  
20 -- or it's not mandated, put it that way -- and it doesn't  
21 have any funding source, there's no retention.

22           So I think one way of resolving this would be to  
23 identify trafficking as an overpayment. That would make it  
24 mandated for the states to investigate and prosecute. And  
25 it would give the states a source of recovery retention to

1 fund the programs and the investigators in that program.

2           Another incentive would be to give the states a  
3 portion of the savings as a result of disqualification.

4 Right now, we spend our resources to hire the staff to  
5 disqualify people, but we don't get any kind of retention  
6 for the disqualification savings.

7           Now, I understand the Department of Agriculture  
8 doesn't get any savings in that, either, because the money's  
9 never issued. But maybe it needs to be kicked up a notch so  
10 that you can get some kind of savings out of disqualifying  
11 people who should not be receiving food stamps.

12           I thank you.

13           MS. WATKINS: Thank you very much, Mr. Campbell.

14           Patricia Young. Ms. Young.

15           MS. YOUNG: I'm Patricia Young. I coordinate  
16 World Food Day in the United States.

17           My comments are going to be a little out of step  
18 from all you've heard, but they are very intentional. As a  
19 result of working with the Food Stamp Program in one way or  
20 another ever since it began, and in working in the larger  
21 context of food security for everybody, I would underscore  
22 the detailed specific recommendations you've heard because  
23 they come from experts, hands-on working day by day with the  
24 people who receive the program. We don't question that the  
25 Food Stamp Program is necessary, that improving it is a very

1 admirable goal. And all of us in this room would be behind  
2 you in doing that.

3           As I say, I knew you'd have a lot of specifics,  
4 but I think all the conversations that we have about food  
5 for the poor, food for the needy in this country, need to  
6 always be within a larger context. That the conversations  
7 need to be in a larger, set in a larger framework.

8           So I'm just going to suggest a very few questions,  
9 no answers, but important for us all to keep in mind as we  
10 work on the details.

11           My first one is why are we asking questions about  
12 changing the procedures? We know the answers. I've been  
13 hearing the answers, as I say, for a good many years. And  
14 some of them from the speakers you've heard today.

15           I think we should be asking questions about a food  
16 system that makes food stamps necessary. I think in view of  
17 some commitments our nation is made, that we need to ask  
18 what would change if the right to food were national policy.

19           I think we need to ask a question similar to one  
20 we ask internationally about bringing together all the parts  
21 of a society that affect the poor and food security.

22           So I was intrigued with a question that came to me  
23 today about what would be the result if the cabinet  
24 secretaries of Health, Labor, Treasury, Education and  
25 Agriculture held a strategy session on national food policy.

1 What if they held it with Fortune 500 CEOs? What would be  
2 different in the conversation if it were with 500 NGO  
3 executives? Or with 500 food stamp recipients?

4           Wouldn't it be better to be talking about  
5 preventive steps for people needing food stamps rather than  
6 improving, fiddling with the program? And in light of the  
7 election, I had a question. What would happen if all the  
8 food banks in the country declared a 24-hour moratorium a  
9 month before the election, or a week before the election?

10           We really have to be thinking about how to reduce  
11 the gap between the overfed that we heard about in the  
12 nutrition summit and the underfed that we don't hear enough  
13 about.

14           Thank you.

15           MS. WATKINS: Thank you.

16           Do you need to stand up and stretch? And if you  
17 feel like it and you need to, feel comfortable in doing so.  
18 I don't want you to think that you're sitting here and  
19 you're getting tired or you're getting sleepy. So whatever  
20 you need to do to stand up. And if you wave, I understand  
21 you're not waving at me. That you're just getting some  
22 exercise.

23           And we'll stop after awhile and take a break. So  
24 go right ahead and stand up if you need to or go get some  
25 water, or whatever you need to do. Feel free to come and

1 go. It's okay, it's not going to bother us. We'll continue  
2 with our conversation with you.

3 Our next speaker is Cecilia Perry. Ms. Perry.

4 MS. PERRY: Thank you.

5 Good afternoon. Thank you for the opportunity to  
6 be here today. I'm Cecilia Perry and I'm with the American  
7 Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees,  
8 AFSCME. And we represent 1.3 million state and local  
9 government and health care workers throughout the country.

10 Thousands of our members work in food stamp  
11 offices and welfare offices and perform the food stamp  
12 eligibility certification. AFSCME applauds USDA for holding  
13 these conversations to discuss how to better serve low-  
14 income families. And we also applaud you for your, some of  
15 the program changes you've already made, including some of  
16 the changes in quality control error rates and the raising  
17 of the vehicle asset limits.

18 It's unfortunate that in these times of economic  
19 growth, so many families still need food stamps. But we are  
20 fortunate that this program exists. And maintaining this  
21 nutritional safety net is very critical to ensuring the  
22 nutritional well being of people, poor people in this  
23 country.

24 Absolutely key to retaining the integrity of the  
25 Food Stamp Program is maintaining the entitlement for all



1 eligible people. We also support restoration of food stamps  
2 to legal immigrants and the elimination of the ABOD work  
3 requirement.

4           The dramatic decline in case loads is very  
5 disturbing. While there are many factors contributing to  
6 this trend, we know that TANF state policies limiting  
7 eligibility for that program have directly contributed to  
8 this decline.

9           Too often case workers are getting conflicting and  
10 confusing messages. And in the rush to reduce TANF case  
11 loads, states, inadvertently or advertently, have reduced  
12 access to food stamps.

13           A key to strengthening the integrity of the Food  
14 Stamp Program is maintaining public administration. The  
15 current law requires public employees hired under a merit-  
16 based system of employment to administer the program and  
17 certify applicants for food stamps. No profit motive exists  
18 for limiting eligibility or delaying services.

19           In contrast, the TANF program permits states to  
20 contract out or privatize program administration. And we  
21 have grave concerns with some of the results from some of  
22 these state experiments.

23           AFSCME recently updated our study of the Wisconsin  
24 TANF program in Milwaukee called W2. And we found that the  
25 amount of a private agency's profit was directly related to

1 the surplus it could generate. In other words, the less  
2 private agencies spent on services and benefits, the greater  
3 their profits. And I will submit a copy of that recent  
4 study for the record.

5           Thus, the private agencies in Milwaukee have had a  
6 fiscal incentive to reduce case loads to lower their  
7 contract expenses, and thus, generate a greater profit.  
8 During the first 28 months of operation, the W2 agencies  
9 generated a collective, unrestricted profit of \$27 million.

10           The most disturbing method private agencies have  
11 used to lower costs have been to simply divert clients who  
12 needed services away from the program. Many of the people  
13 diverted from W2 have also been diverted from food stamps  
14 and Medicaid, even though they are eligible.

15           And finally, AFSCME supports the Kennedy-Specter  
16 Hunger Relief Act now in Congress, and I've limited my  
17 comments and made them very brief because I know you have  
18 many speakers today.

19           And thank you very much.

20           MS. WATKINS: Thank you, Cecilia.

21           Shana -- Sheena McConnell. You correct it if I  
22 pronounced it incorrectly.

23           MS. MCCONNELL: No, that was great.

24           MS. WATKINS: And I apologize.

25           MS. MCCONNELL: That was great. Sheena McConnell

1 from Mathematical Policy Research. And I'd like to make two  
2 points based on our research, one positive and one to  
3 underline a concern.

4           First, our research on the Food Stamp Program has  
5 shown that overall the program's quite successful in serving  
6 the people who receive them. Several years ago,  
7 Mathematical conducted a survey of about 2,000 recipients.  
8 We found that 86 percent, over 86 percent of the people said  
9 that overall they were satisfied with the program. And  
10 there were similarly high percentages of recipients said  
11 that they were satisfied with the application process and  
12 the recertification process.

13           That's not to say that they didn't bring up  
14 specific problems with the program. They did. But overall,  
15 they thought it was serving them well.

16           This brings me to the concern, which is as I'm  
17 sure you're aware, that over the past four years, there's  
18 been a dramatic cut in the participation rates, the number  
19 -- the proportion of people who are eligible for the program  
20 who actually participate.

21           Now, as the previous speaker was saying, much of  
22 this decrease has occurred amongst TANF recipients. But  
23 also, the working poor and the poor elderly have for a very  
24 long time had low participation rates. The participation  
25 rate amongst the working poor is less than a half. And only

1 about one-third of elderly people who are eligible for food  
2 stamps actually receive them.

3           So what is caused this low participation rate?

4 Well, we did some studies about the reasons for  
5 nonparticipation and found that misperceptions about  
6 people's eligibility for food stamps was one of the most  
7 important reasons why people didn't participate.

8           In the national food stamp survey we found that  
9 over 70 percent of the people, low-income people who didn't  
10 participate in the program said that they were unaware of  
11 their eligibility for food stamps.

12           Similarly, in a study of the working poor and poor  
13 elderly, in focus groups in a small pretest of the survey,  
14 we found that misperceptions about eligibility were very  
15 important. People said in focus groups things like, "Well,  
16 we don't have children, therefore, we're not eligible,  
17 right?" Or, you know, "We have a car so therefore we're not  
18 eligible."

19           Now, are these low rates of participation a  
20 concern? Is the decline in participation rate a concern? A  
21 recent study that just came out from Economic Research  
22 Service found -- looked at food insecurity, which is sort of  
23 a broad measure of accessibility to food. They found over  
24 the past -- since 1995 to 1999, overall in America, food  
25 insecurity has decreased. Not surprising with a booming

1 economy.

2           But of concern they found that the low-income  
3 people who didn't receive food stamps, they found that food  
4 insecurity is actually increased for this population over  
5 that period.

6           So yes, people who are not receiving food stamps  
7 but who are eligible are in need.

8           This also, the study of ERS, I think also backs up  
9 or is consistent with the anecdotal evidence that we've  
10 heard of the increase in use of the emergency food services.

11           So I would just like to encourage your efforts  
12 that I know you've been making over the past to understand  
13 the reasons for the decrease in the participation rates.  
14 And I'd just like to encourage you to continue that good  
15 work.

16           And thank you very much for allowing me to speak  
17 today.

18           MS. WATKINS: Thank you very much, Ms. McConnell.

19           The next speaker is Michael Wilson, UFCW. And you  
20 may want to tell us what UFCW is, Mr. Wilson. We in the  
21 federal government have all these acronyms, and sometimes we  
22 don't know what they are. And you add another one.

23           MR. WILSON: We have a good one. United Food and  
24 Commercial Workers International Union. We are the largest  
25 private sector union in North America. Most importantly,

1 however, more than a million UFCW members in the United  
2 States work in food manufacturing, processing or in retail.

3           So we have a lot of concern about the Food Stamp  
4 Program and we have a lot of connection to the Food Stamp  
5 Program.

6           We believe that the feeding of America's people is  
7 what we do for a living. At the same time, we know there  
8 are millions of Americans who are hungry and malnourished in  
9 our communities all over the nation. And the Food Stamp  
10 Program, while not perfect, is a very important part of  
11 reducing the malnourished and the hungry.

12           We support the program, support strengthening the  
13 program, and hope that out of the conversations you're going  
14 to have, you're going to get good suggestions which will  
15 enable you to go forward to make some of the changes that  
16 are necessary.

17           I want to align my remarks with what our friends  
18 at FRAC said and what our brothers and sisters at AFSCME  
19 said. I mean, a lot of the things that you're hearing are  
20 what I think a lot of us support and believe in.

21           I want to talk about a few specific things. We  
22 fully support the changes which would enable easier access  
23 for families with reliable vehicles to qualify.

24           We support restoration of benefits for legal  
25 immigrants. We want to help eliminate the discrepancy of

1 the eligibility for elderly citizens and elderly legal  
2 immigrants.

3           We also support increasing the maximum income  
4 level. We support the Hunger Relief Act, the Fork Act, the  
5 Kennedy-Specter bills. We think those are doable and we  
6 hope they'll get enacted this Congress.

7           We have a different connection to the Food Stamp  
8 Program by the virtue of our members' employment. We don't  
9 manage the program, we don't control the program. But when  
10 people have food stamps, they usually give them to our  
11 members when they buy food. And so we see hungry people  
12 every day in grocery stores all around the country who need  
13 the food that we can give them when they have food stamps.  
14 And so we want to encourage the program to move forward to  
15 reduce hunger.

16           In conclusion -- and I'm going to be very brief --  
17 we're also opposed to any proposed changes which would make  
18 it more difficult for low-income people moving from poverty  
19 to self-sufficiency to retain their food stamp eligibility.

20           And as was said earlier about the impact on  
21 children, we know the great -- as you had said in your  
22 opening remarks, the impact on children who otherwise can't  
23 get food except through food stamps from their parents and  
24 their families, is something this country has to be very  
25 proud of, that we can provide those nutrients to those

1 children and protect the program.

2           And that's all I have to say. Thank you very  
3 much.

4           MS. WATKINS: Thank you very much, Mr. Wilson.

5           The next speaker, Ruth Noel. Ms. Noel.

6           MS. NOEL: Thank you for this opportunity to be  
7 here today. I'm Ruth Noel with Community Ministry of  
8 Montgomery County, a nonprofit agency in Maryland,  
9 representing 111 member faith congregations in our county of  
10 all religious denominations.

11           We have been working with the poor now for over 26  
12 years and are considered the conscience of the county.

13           I'd like to make a few points today in terms of  
14 ways to improve and make it easier for the folks who really  
15 need this program to use it.

16           Many of our clients have told us that it's not  
17 worth their while to go and apply for food stamps. We've  
18 talked about the \$10 minimum level. And we being one of the  
19 wealthiest counties in the nation, we still have over 51  
20 percent of our children who are eligible for free and  
21 reduced lunch program.

22           So we have a large population that has low income,  
23 and yet is trying to live in a high-rent district. And so  
24 it's very difficult for them to pay the rent and the  
25 utilities and still put food on their tables.



1           So the income levels for our county often are --  
2 the national poverty levels which take into account areas  
3 where the cost of living is much lower really makes it  
4 difficult for our families.

5           Many of our -- the recertification process when  
6 you're on it, or even to apply, often means taking off work  
7 for a day and losing what most of our families feel that  
8 it's not worth giving up a day's wages to go and apply. And  
9 it's really critical that there be some way to apply by  
10 mail, by phone, or that hours are established in the evening  
11 and weekends for those people who are working.

12           And many times they're working two or three jobs  
13 to be able to make ends meet. So even, you know, the mail  
14 or they may or may not have access to computers, so mail or  
15 phone might be worthwhile to consider.

16           Another area is we have many immigrants in our  
17 county from all over the world. And the parents may or may  
18 not be eligible for food stamps based on their residency,  
19 documented or undocumented. However, many of their children  
20 are U.S. citizens.

21           And these parents have been told, via the  
22 grapevine, that if they apply for benefits for their  
23 children for food stamps, they will lose their opportunity  
24 to become a legal, a documented U.S. resident. Because the,  
25 they think that this is one of the benefits that eliminates

1 them from residency because they're dependent on the  
2 government.

3           And this one really -- the way to address this has  
4 to be done in literature in many languages, through  
5 advertisements in the transit systems throughout the --  
6 particularly the major cities. Through media, particularly  
7 the Spanish language medias nationwide, but there are cable  
8 languages in -- many other languages that have cable  
9 stations, local newspapers, local language newspapers that  
10 needs to be addressed.

11           Because their children are not getting the  
12 nutrition. It's putting them at a disadvantage in the  
13 school system. Because of that, their only good meals may  
14 be what they get at school. And they come home and have to  
15 make shift for supper and during the summer months when the  
16 school program is closed.

17           Also, the lifetime ban on those who have drug  
18 abuse -- drug verdicts. It unfairly penalizes those who  
19 make a turnabout in their life. And the idea of not having  
20 a second chance is really goes against the faith-based  
21 community.

22           You know, if someone has had the strength to kick  
23 their drug habit and made a clean start in their life, it  
24 really seems totally unfair that if down the line, they need  
25 to be able to receive food stamps at some point that they're

1 ineligible.

2           And we support what others have said in terms of  
3 raising the income allotments and the disregards to make it  
4 easier for more people because the cost of living is so high  
5 in our area.

6           Thank you very much.

7           MS. WATKINS: Thank you, Ms. Noel.

8           Mary Prioleau-Seares.

9           MS. PRIOLEAU-SEARES: Prioleau-Searles.

10          MS. WATKINS: Prioleau-Seares.

11          MS. PRIOLEAU-SEARLES: Yes. Good afternoon,  
12 everyone.

13          Traveling here from New Jersey, I was  
14 contemplating along on what I was going to say. But sitting  
15 here and listening since I've been here, I've changed  
16 everything I'm going to say.

17          To start it off, I'd like to introduce myself.  
18 I'm Mary Prioleau-Searles. I'm president and founder of the  
19 E & L Caring Agency. We're a nonprofit agency located in  
20 Willingboro, New Jersey. I'm also chairperson for the group  
21 of the CEAS Group for our county in Burlington County. That  
22 stands for Comprehensive Emergency Assisted System. I'm  
23 also president of our Special Eds groups for the Board of  
24 Education in the town that I live in. And also, I'm the  
25 second term for the board for South Jersey Food Bank.

1 I have a lot of good credentials, but now I'd like  
2 to introduce the real Mary Prioleau-Searles. I'm one of  
3 those persons in 1987 who was in a serious car accident, who  
4 had everything I guess you would say in the American dream,  
5 house, car, good job and all that. And all that came to a  
6 halt.

7 Tractor-trailer going to the airport one morning,  
8 I had a serious accident that left me disabled to the extent  
9 that I couldn't work. I lost some digits, a lot of other  
10 serious things happened to my family and I end up being one  
11 of those statistics on food stamps. And I thank God food  
12 stamps were there for my family at that time.

13 My husband had a breakdown because of the  
14 situation with my family and the car accident, so he  
15 couldn't work. All of our children were in that car, so  
16 each of us had actually something happen to us that morning.

17 But to make a long story short, what I'm trying to  
18 say is you can have everything going for you one day and be  
19 in the wrong place the next day, and have nothing going for  
20 you. But God is good and I thank God for the food program  
21 being there for me and my family. But it's a stepping  
22 stone. It's not a program that I believe that we should set  
23 a standard that a family wants to be on forever.

24 I was on food stamps for one year. That was long  
25 enough for me to get it together. It took me many surgeries

1 and many of years of therapy to get my life together, but  
2 only took me one year to get things together so we could get  
3 on our feet. And I think it should just be a program that  
4 if you would ask a person, do you enjoy being on food  
5 stamps, do you enjoy being poor, I'm sure the answer would  
6 be no.

7           I appreciated the fact that the program was there  
8 for me, but I didn't want to stay on that program. I wasn't  
9 proud every time I went to the store with food stamps.  
10 People look at you kind of strange. They didn't know my  
11 situation, but still. But I thanked the program for being  
12 there.

13           But getting to what I really want to say, E & L  
14 Caring Agency is a nonprofit agency. I'm the president and  
15 founder. We do a food distribution once a month. I feed  
16 anyone that has a need for food in our county. That's  
17 Burlington County in New Jersey. Our largest group that  
18 comes out are our seniors. I'm here to advocate for the  
19 seniors. They seem to get left out on a lot.

20           Seventy percent of our clients are seniors. The  
21 other 30 percent are needy families, disabled individuals.  
22 And we have a new class of individuals, the working needy.  
23 They come out every month. Our agency supplies them with  
24 two weeks' supply of food. That's every third Wednesday of  
25 the month they come out and they get the food. And we feed

1 over 200 to 300 people per month. That's including, you  
2 know, individuals in the family.

3           It's a great program. I went to USDA with a  
4 proposal on helping me get a building where I can expand  
5 this program. They're willing to help me. I'm here to  
6 thank you for that.

7           And one of the things that our project would --  
8 this building that I would like to see happen is we want a  
9 one-stop shopping center where they can get everything in  
10 one building. We're going to have a feeding center, we  
11 would like to have a feeding center, a food distribution  
12 center, a training center, which is important. If you're  
13 going to give an individual food stamps, it doesn't matter,  
14 if they don't know the basic skills on what to do with those  
15 food stamps, they're not going to be used properly and the  
16 children may not be fed properly, either. We just can't  
17 take it for granted that everyone knows what to buy with  
18 those food stamps.

19           Our training center will educate them, we will  
20 teach them basic skills that they need to know, how to  
21 budget, which is very important. We will also teach them  
22 how to get a job, how to keep a job, and how to build up  
23 your self-esteem.

24           Once again, I would like to thank USDA. We have a  
25 great program in Burlington County called Farmers Against

1 Hunger where USDA actually goes to all the farmers in our  
2 state, collect up vegetables and fruit. And we're one of  
3 those great agencies to go out each week and deliver them to  
4 our seniors at the day care centers.

5           And I thank you very much for letting me speak  
6 this afternoon.

7           MS. WATKINS: Thank you very much, Ms. Seares.

8           The next speaker, Nancy Hatch. Ms. Hatch.

9           MS. HATCH: I think you can barely see me over  
10 this. My name is Nancy Hatch. I work for the  
11 Presbyterian Church's Washington Office. The Washington  
12 office is the public policy office for the Presbyterian  
13 Church USA. And I wanted to make comments today based on  
14 the policy of the Presbyterian Church as a denomination,  
15 both on sort of public assistance and its role in society in  
16 general. But also, on a very strong policy that the  
17 denomination has on food nutrition programs and their  
18 importance in society, including, especially the Food Stamp  
19 Program.

20           Sort of two basic foundations for that policy, or  
21 that that policy promotes is, one, emphasizing the good that  
22 food programs, hunger nutrition programs, especially food  
23 stamps have done. And in light of that, I feel the need to  
24 emphasize as the sort of platform for continuing food stamp  
25 discussion that we keep that in mind. That we keep the good

1 that it's done.

2           I think that one of the problems that we saw when  
3 TANF was being born was so much emphasis was on the negative  
4 things that welfare reform has done that were often in  
5 minority. Emphasis about fraud, which certainly is a  
6 problem, both within public assistance in general, but  
7 within food stamps -- and also within food stamps.

8           But so often when you look at the big picture, you  
9 see it that it's really a fraction what's going on. And we  
10 would greatly fear any policy changes that would punish the  
11 majority of public assistance recipients and food stamp  
12 benefits who are playing by the rules and getting the food  
13 they need, but because of the wrongs that the few have done  
14 -- for example, we firmly believe that things such as the  
15 finger imaging should not be done. That they try to put so  
16 much emphasis into taking care of fraud and take away funds  
17 that could go into enrolling more people and increasing  
18 benefits levels.

19           So to continue to -- I think we're in a society  
20 where for too often we focus on the negative things that  
21 happen and we don't realize what good a new program has done  
22 until suddenly the program disappears or there's a drastic  
23 decrease in enrollment and you have an increase of people in  
24 need.

25           So we should see what's going on behind the scenes



1 and realize that it's more good than something that's  
2 problem.

3           Secondly, most of the recommendations we have are  
4 based on an understanding that the federal government needs  
5 to set standards within the Food Stamp Program. That  
6 standard should include things like requirements for food  
7 stamp offices to have to have extended hours, to be located  
8 in places that are accessible to public service, which is  
9 what many low-income people rely on for transportation.  
10 That also forms are made as simple as possible and that  
11 they're available in multiple languages.

12           Also, all publications or regular communications  
13 to food stamp recipients, such as termination notices,  
14 should also be in multiple languages. And that in areas  
15 where there's say 10 percent or so of the population or more  
16 who do not speak English as a first language, that food  
17 stamp office employees should have at least a few bilingual  
18 staff members there to be able to do translation on site, as  
19 well as having multilingual forms available.

20           The application, as I said, should be made  
21 simpler. It should be done in a timely manner. When  
22 people, you know, finally get to the food stamp offices,  
23 they don't have three months to wait for something to be  
24 processed. Their stomachs are hungry now, their children  
25 need to be fed now. And obviously, processing can't happen

1 overnight, but something like 10 days would be I think quite  
2 reasonable to ask in the turnover time before people begin  
3 to get their first benefit allotment.

4           Also grievance procedure so that it exists as part  
5 of the food stamp system at the local level, so that people  
6 who have been denied benefits or have been given a lower  
7 benefit than they're entitled to, have a way to make a  
8 petition and get that situation rectified without having to  
9 go first to the regular judicial system as a means of doing  
10 that.

11           Then, also, there should be federal standards for  
12 monitoring Food Stamp Programs at the state, and to a lesser  
13 extent, at the local level to make sure that those programs  
14 are being conducted the way they're supposed to be run.  
15 That people are being informed as to their eligibility. And  
16 the realization that as much as states may protest that,  
17 that when a state is complying with the standards that it's  
18 supposed to, there shouldn't be any problem with that  
19 happening.

20           There also should be federal funding for local  
21 outreach projects to be done, both through the food stamp  
22 auspices, but also available to community-based  
23 organizations that work with low-income people so that they  
24 can pass that information on. And also, even have specific  
25 people who are paid to be outreach workers to spread the

1 word around, to help get the word out about enrollment.

2           As for a specific things having to do with the  
3 program that could be changed, increases in federal  
4 standards for eligibility and also for benefit levels. One  
5 of the problems that has happened is that the resources that  
6 are taken into consideration or have less value than they  
7 did at the time when they originally made part of the  
8 program standards.

9           And also, the benefit levels are lower than what  
10 their equivalent value is today based on inflation. So  
11 there needs to be ways to continue to increase benefit  
12 levels and to decrease the number of resources, or at least  
13 the way that resources are accommodated for within  
14 determining eligibility and also benefit levels.

15           For example, with the shelter cap deduction that  
16 ultimately not only should be a measure in the Hunger Relief  
17 Act be taken to increase that deduction cap, but ultimately  
18 there should be no cap on the deduction so that people who  
19 have extreme shelter needs can deduct a significant more  
20 amount from their benefit, allowing them to get a benefit  
21 that actually reflects their cost-of-living situation.

22           Then also things pertaining to being eligible for  
23 food stamps, such as the vehicle allowance, should be raised  
24 to a higher federal standard. My organization also supports  
25 the vehicle allowance measure within the Hunger Relief Act.

1 We support that entire measure, or that entire legislation,  
2 as well as the Fork Act.

3           However, one concern is that when the way it's  
4 done by allowing states that have TANF level -- or to set  
5 their vehicle allowance at TANF levels will be wonderful for  
6 people that live in those states and those states choose to  
7 take advantage of the legislation.

8           However, it winds up being fairly random because  
9 people that live in states that either don't have higher  
10 TANF levels or that don't choose to make the TANF the  
11 standard won't be able to get eligibility for what appears  
12 to be a fairly random reason.

13           Certainly it's an important first step to use the  
14 provision in the Hunger Relief Act as a starter, but it  
15 should be seen as simply a first step, rather than a  
16 standard as a way of increasing the way assets are treated.

17           The one last thing I had commented on is the need  
18 to make sure that the electronics benefits system is  
19 completed and carried out in the states that are still  
20 implementing it, and also on the states that have already  
21 implemented it, to allow it to be compatible with the  
22 farmer's market nutrition programs. I understand that in  
23 many instances, it's significantly jeopardized the ability,  
24 if not eliminated the ability for people to use their  
25 benefits at farmer's markets. And that's extremely

1 important ways for people to get access to much wider  
2 variety of nutritious fresh produce than they would get at  
3 your normal food vendors. And also to be able to have a way  
4 to support local agriculture.

5           So I encourage that the federal government set  
6 standards for looking at the different programs that are  
7 being done as pilot projects on different parts of the  
8 country and make sure that those get implemented as  
9 standards for the farmer market nutrition programs.

10           Thank you.

11           MS. WATKINS: Thank you, Ms. Hatch.

12           I just thought I'd ask that we take maybe a five-  
13 minute break so that you can stand up. I know this is  
14 getting quite interesting for those of you who are not  
15 accustomed to sitting for long periods of time. Like me.

16           (Whereupon, a brief recess was taken.)

17           MS. PARADIS: We're delighted to actually have one  
18 of the commissioners of the state welfare program here,  
19 Lynda Fox, who's the Maryland Commissioner from Human  
20 Resources. And I think that just exemplifies the importance  
21 of this program that we would have a commissioner come and  
22 spend some time with us this afternoon.

23           And I understand that Commissioner Fox has a plane  
24 to catch and needs to leave at 3:30, so, going to bump her  
25 up just a little bit in the speaking order and let her go

1 ahead and give her comments now.

2 We're glad to have you.

3 COMMISSIONER FOX: Thanks. Thank you, Julie.

4 For the record, I am Lynda Fox. Good afternoon.

5 I am the Secretary of Maryland Department of Human  
6 Resources. And we operate the Food Stamp Program through  
7 our 24 departments of social services.

8 First I want to thank Undersecretary Watkins for  
9 holding this conversation. I think it's a very important  
10 conversation for us to be having at this time.

11 I think the other speakers have been very eloquent  
12 about why the Food Stamp Program is important and absolutely  
13 critical to so many Americans. And I think it's precisely  
14 because the program is so important to so many people that  
15 it is also the time that we must have reform, and that that  
16 reform needs to be fundamental, far-ranging and lasting.

17 I think the Food Stamp Program has become  
18 increasingly important as our cash assistance case loads  
19 have gone down. But unfortunately, the current law hasn't  
20 given states the ability to keep pace with the change on the  
21 cash assistance side. And to meet the challenges of helping  
22 low income families and working families. Nor does it  
23 adequately meet the nutritional needs of elderly and  
24 disabled households.

25 I can summarize my remarks very briefly in just a

1 few words. My advice is this:

2           One, simplify the program.

3           Two, give states the flexibility to integrate a  
4 simplified program into their welfare reform efforts.

5           And three, retarget how we measure the success of  
6 a simplified program. More specifically, with regard to  
7 program simplification, the program's eligibility rules have  
8 grown more and more complex over the years. The program's  
9 complex income, asset and deduction rules confuse both our  
10 staff and our customers. The complexity is a considerable  
11 barrier to participation. It works against our attempts at  
12 outreach.

13           People who don't understand the rules and don't  
14 understand the effects of the rules often simply don't want  
15 to apply or don't want to follow through the whole process.

16           It also works against our attempts to make the  
17 program more accessible. No matter how many hours we're  
18 open or how many places were available to take applications,  
19 some people just don't want to go into a programmatic house  
20 of mirrors, no matter how convenient we try to make it.

21           Second, give states the flexibility to integrate a  
22 simplified program into their welfare reform program.  
23 States really need the kind of flexibility that we were  
24 given in TANF. Short of that, there needs to be real waiver  
25 authority for the Secretary to help us test how to do it

1 better.

2           And third, to retarget how we measure simplified  
3 program's success. We really think we need to re-examine  
4 the food stamp quality control system. The current focus on  
5 process and payment accuracy reflects only one component of  
6 the program's success, albeit an important component.

7           I'd like to get a little bit more specific now on  
8 some of these points and make some very specific  
9 recommendations.

10           In terms of program simplification, we really need  
11 to do away with some of the complexity. For example,  
12 currently the program takes a household's income and makes  
13 certain adjustments to calculate eligibility and benefit  
14 levels. And with good intent, and I think the intent was  
15 usually to make the program more equitable, over time there  
16 have been numerous changes and additions, mostly additions,  
17 that have made what was basically a fairly simple, logical  
18 process much more complex than we think it needs to be.

19           This complexity of the income and benefit  
20 calculations has really become one of the program's greatest  
21 administrative burdens.

22           For example, when a family member first gets a  
23 job, they have to deal with transportation costs and child  
24 care costs. And neither the agency nor the customer we're  
25 serving knows how many hours that person may be working in a



1 week and what kind of income fluctuation they may have.

2           Case in point. One of our counties got so  
3 frustrated at their ability to -- or inability, really, to  
4 achieve payment accuracy, they began doing monthly income  
5 certifications for those customers that had earned income.  
6 And they found that about half of their customers had a  
7 change in income in any given month. And I think that just  
8 illustrates how much flux there is in the income of these  
9 families.

10           We would recommend that we do something in food  
11 stamps similar to what is been done in the Medicaid program.  
12 That we have a transitional Food Stamp Program for those  
13 individuals who have left cash assistance for earnings. And  
14 that the benefits be available for some set period of time,  
15 six months, maybe something more, wherein they will receive  
16 the same benefit level regardless of fluctuation in income.

17           This would give families a chance for their  
18 circumstances to stabilize and not have them taking time off  
19 from work to come in and change their income status and  
20 their benefits.

21           A second example of simplification would be that  
22 the food stamp asset limits have simply not kept pace with  
23 the cost of living and conflict with the goals of welfare  
24 reform.

25           And I think some of the other speakers have

1 already talked about the inappropriateness of the current  
2 vehicle limit.

3           We would suggest that we have an increase in the  
4 allowable asset limit to \$3,000 per household, and that we  
5 exclude some other types of assets. And for vehicles, we  
6 would suggest excluding one vehicle for each household  
7 member who either must fulfill a work requirement or is  
8 employed, and one vehicle for a household that has no one  
9 working or no work requirement.

10           We also think the household composition rules  
11 could be simplified. We think that wherever there are  
12 children under the age of 18, regardless of how meals get  
13 purchased and prepared, that those children and their  
14 parents should constitute a single household.

15           And we also think, sort of on the other hand, that  
16 anyone over the age of 18, even if they have a physical or  
17 mental disability and can't prepare their own meals, should  
18 be counted as a household of one for simplicity's sake.

19           With regard to flexibility for states to integrate  
20 their simplified programs into welfare reform, Maryland did  
21 try to use the simplified Food Stamp Program. And we just  
22 simply weren't successful.

23           The current waiver authority seems to be far too  
24 restrictive on the ability of the Secretary to grant  
25 waivers. And the year-to-year cost neutrality requirement

1 imposes a burden that just cannot be overcome.

2           When the simplified Food Stamp Program was  
3 offered, we worked with the contractor that USDA engaged.  
4 It was quickly evident that we could not possibly meet the  
5 year-to-year cost neutrality. And we also realized that we  
6 would be operating two separate programs, the simplified  
7 program and the rest of the program. And that this would  
8 cause so many administrative and fiscal difficulties that it  
9 simply wouldn't be prudent to proceed.

10           There are some examples of some of the lack of  
11 conformity between our cash assistance programs and the Food  
12 Stamp Program that I think are worth talking about.

13           One is certainly the area of diversion payments.  
14 Some count as income for food stamps, some do not. But  
15 these are payments that are really geared toward helping  
16 families become self-sufficient. And we think that we  
17 really confuse families with these rules that are very, very  
18 esoteric. And it frustrates state's efforts to help move  
19 families from welfare to work.

20           We would recommend that the Secretary's waiver  
21 authority be expanded. And that that authority would allow  
22 her to approve the waiver request of any state that seeks to  
23 simplify administration of the program and to improve access  
24 to its benefits.

25           And that cost neutrality would be calculated over

1 multiyear periods. And that cost neutrality could consider  
2 savings to other programs, including programs at the state  
3 and local level.

4 I think that's kind of it. Without changing some  
5 of those rules and regulations, we don't think waiver  
6 authority is really very meaningful.

7 And third, in terms of retargeting how we measure  
8 success, we think we need to focus on the way we evaluate  
9 the effectiveness of the program. Currently, we're looking  
10 only at the quality control process and looking at  
11 compliance with detailed payment accuracy requirements.

12 States that exceed the national average of errors  
13 are subject to substantial financial penalties. Yet this  
14 system gives no credit to states for their successes in  
15 moving families towards independence, no credit for outreach  
16 efforts, no credit for additional activities such as  
17 nutrition education.

18 One of the points that one of the earlier speakers  
19 made is that food stamps are great but you need to know how  
20 to use them.

21 No assessment of the primary goal of the program:  
22 providing nutritional food security, improving nutritional  
23 well-being.

24 We would recommend that we replace the current  
25 quality control system with a new system of outcome

1 measures, to assess goals appropriate to working families  
2 and to other program recipients. Maryland would be the  
3 first state to volunteer to work with USDA, other states and  
4 the nutrition advocates to create such a system.

5           In closing, I'll sort of end as I began. I  
6 believe we must simplify the program, give states the  
7 flexibility to integrate a simplified program into their  
8 welfare reform efforts and retarget how we measure the  
9 success of the program.

10           Thank you all for your time and attention.

11           MS. PARADIS: Thank you, Commissioner Fox, and fly  
12 safe.

13           Our next commenter is Laurel Weir. And I hope I  
14 pronounced that properly.

15           MR. WEIR: Good afternoon. I'm Laurel Weir and  
16 I'm the policy director for the National Law Center on  
17 Homelessness and Poverty. The law center's a not-for-profit  
18 legal advocacy organization that monitors implementation of  
19 federal programs that assist homeless people.

20           I come today to recommend changes in the programs,  
21 in the food stamp law that would help the Food Stamp Program  
22 to better serve homeless people.

23           Approximately three years, the law center  
24 conducted a survey of homeless people in the Metropolitan  
25 D.C. area and to ask them about their experiences with the

1 Food Stamp Program.

2           At around the same time, the law center also  
3 surveyed a sampling of nonprofit organizations around the  
4 country to determine if their clients were having any  
5 problems with applying for or receiving food stamp benefits.

6           The law center developed recommendations after  
7 analyzing the results of these surveys, and that's what I'm  
8 going to present to you today. As well as recommendations  
9 that were developed after looking at a recently published  
10 federal study, which the U.S. Department of Agriculture  
11 co-sponsored that looked at homeless persons' access to  
12 food, their health status and the receipt of federal  
13 benefits.

14           The recently published federal survey which you're  
15 probably aware of, which results were conducted in 1996  
16 before most of the welfare changes had taken place, found  
17 that only 37 percent of the homeless population received  
18 food stamps even though most homeless people are likely  
19 eligible.

20           The survey also found that 40 percent of the  
21 homeless population had gone an entire day without food in  
22 the past 30 days. And approximately 20 percent of the  
23 population usually ate one or fewer meals per day.

24           Obviously, these show us that many of the people  
25 who really need this program are not getting it.

1           The recommendations that the law center would make  
2 to improve access to homeless people, some of them you're  
3 going to recognize, you've heard them before. So I'm going  
4 to start with the ones that are new.

5           First of all, reinstate homelessness as a  
6 qualifying category for expedited food stamps. Given the  
7 large number of homeless people who are experiencing hunger,  
8 it's clear that the need for food is urgent and they should  
9 be able to access the program more quickly.

10           It's also difficult -- the number of these people  
11 that we talked to were unsheltered. And unsheltered people  
12 are the ones who, about 85 percent of that population in the  
13 federal survey reported having food problems.

14           And so for these people, it's critical that they  
15 be able to get access to the Food Stamp Program quickly.

16           Second, strengthen the requirement that states  
17 take steps to allow homeless people without an address to  
18 apply for food stamps. Federal law currently requires them  
19 to make provisions for people without addresses, but from  
20 what we've heard from homeless people and from the  
21 nonprofits that we talk to, this is still not happening in  
22 all instances. And we need to do something to make this  
23 stronger in the law and also in terms of oversight.

24           Third, require states to help homeless people  
25 obtain the documentation that they need. Homeless people

1 often do not have identification. It's difficult to keep  
2 that with you. When you're homeless, you lose a lot of your  
3 possessions or they're stolen in some cases. And it's not  
4 easy for them to obtain the documentation. They don't have  
5 access to phones, they have no money to pay for their birth  
6 certificates.

7           There was a model program developed in Dallas,  
8 Texas, that provides a one-stop center for homeless persons  
9 to obtain copies of their birth certificates if they were  
10 born anywhere in the state of Texas.

11           So normally, the process, as you probably know, is  
12 you have to write away to whatever county you were born in  
13 and it may not be where you are now. And the city partnered  
14 -- it wasn't through the Food Stamp Program, but it's  
15 replicable to the Food Stamp Program. They partnered with  
16 a nonprofit, and the nonprofit worked with the state to get  
17 access to these, to their birth certificates. And it also  
18 took care of the costs for the homeless people so that they  
19 didn't have to come up with money that they didn't have.

20           Fourth, remove the ABOD requirement. The law  
21 center survey was conducted at the beginning of the cutoffs  
22 of so-called able-bodied adults. But we did find homeless  
23 people who had already been cut off for failing to meet the  
24 work requirement.

25           In Virginia, I think the time we were doing the



1 survey, they had just cut people off starting the previous  
2 month. And we were already finding homeless people who'd  
3 been cut off.

4           Most of the people who we interviewed who'd been  
5 cut off were living on the streets and not in shelters. The  
6 federal research indicates that homeless people who are  
7 living on the streets are significantly more likely to have  
8 disabilities than homeless people who live in shelters.

9           In our staff who interviewed the people had a  
10 sense that at least some of them were probably had some form  
11 of mental illness. These people probably should not have  
12 been cut off under federal law because they likely had  
13 disabilities. But disabilities can be difficult to prove,  
14 and especially for people with mental illness. And people  
15 with mental illness might not even understand that they have  
16 a disability.

17           The end result is that people who are not able to  
18 take care of themselves are losing access to the food stamp  
19 benefits.

20           One gentleman whom we interviewed had lost his  
21 benefits and he was now receiving only one meal a day and it  
22 was from a mobile food distribution site where we found him.  
23 And he reported his health had declined since he lost his  
24 benefits, and he reported feeling constantly tired and  
25 having difficulty staying awake.

1           So the end result, the Congress is supposedly  
2 was trying to push people towards self-sufficiency, but they  
3 were making it a lot more difficult for him and many of the  
4 people they're cutting off.

5           ABOD requirement is just a difficult one to  
6 administer. And it's difficult -- the food stamp offices  
7 are not qualified, really, to determine disabilities. And  
8 the SSI program is notorious -- it's a logical one to tie  
9 that to, but it's notorious for not recognizing  
10 disabilities, with people having to appeal and appeal and  
11 appeal.

12           So our recommendation to remove the ABOD  
13 requirement altogether, rather than cut off people who  
14 really need the program.

15           Five, increase the benefit levels. Many food  
16 banks experience increased demand for food at the end of the  
17 month when the benefits have run out as to the soup  
18 kitchens. And the benefit level should be increased to  
19 ensure that recipients are able to purchase food throughout  
20 the month.

21           Six, increase the shelter deduction. Housing  
22 costs have been rising rapidly over the past five years.  
23 It's part of the reason why we're seeing increases in the  
24 numbers of homeless people. And the shelter deduction cap  
25 should be increased to reflect the realities of that housing

1 market.

2           A recent study by the U.S. Department of Housing  
3 and Urban Development found that the number of low-income  
4 families paying more than 50 percent of their income on rent  
5 is at an all-time high. And that leaves fewer resources for  
6 families to meet other needs.

7           Seven, strengthen outreach requirements and  
8 outstationing. I would support Ms. Fox' recommendation that  
9 we give points to states who do a good job at doing  
10 outreach. I think that is an excellent suggestion.

11           And finally, I just want to add our support for  
12 the Hunger Relief Act and for the Fork Act. And that  
13 concludes my remarks. And we stand ready to assist you as  
14 you move forward.

15           Thank you.

16           MS. PARADIS: Our next presenter is Tom Wenning.

17           MR. WENNING: Good afternoon. Undersecretary  
18 Watkins, thank you for holding this forum today. I'm senior  
19 vice president and general counsel for the National Grocers  
20 Association. National Grocers Association represents the  
21 independent retailers and wholesalers that provide service  
22 to food stamp recipients.

23           We've had experience with the program since its  
24 very beginning in 1963 when it was a pilot program initiated  
25 under President Kennedy, and have enjoyed our working

1 relationship with the Department over those years in terms  
2 of trying to simplify and make it simple and provide the  
3 benefits that the Department authorizes to the food stamp  
4 recipients in an efficient and beneficial fashion.

5           I want to thank the Department for its efforts in  
6 helping us in that regard. And I want to talk about a  
7 couple of issues.

8           We had an opportunity to have our board of  
9 directors in town this week, as well as our state  
10 association executives. And I know that you both have had  
11 the opportunity to speak to that group in the past. So we  
12 used this opportunity to discuss with them any of the issues  
13 that they might like to have raised. Certainly with the  
14 idea involved of how we can improve the program and meet the  
15 goals of simplicity and efficiency.

16           First, I'd like to say that we thank you for your  
17 support and your efforts in the passing the EBT and  
18 Inoperability and Portability Act that passed in the  
19 Congress and was initiated at the beginning of the year. We  
20 think that will go a long way in serving food stamp  
21 recipients, enabling them to use their EBT benefits across  
22 state lines.

23           We also want to say that there are a couple things  
24 that, while they happened in an isolated instance, there is  
25 a need for retailers to be authorized in a quick and

1 efficient fashion in order to serve food stamp recipients as  
2 there are stores that transition. And we think it would be  
3 particularly helpful that if it could be recognized that  
4 food stamp retailers who have been in the program for years  
5 and have a legitimate authorization, no bad history, could  
6 be expedited for approval when they buy a store that's  
7 already been in existence. So that the food stamp recipient  
8 does not have to wait until the authorization is complete.  
9 It would be helpful so that that recipient, then, is not  
10 forced to go to another store, inconvenienced by that  
11 process.

12           There have been some cases where we've seen that  
13 the delay in time as much as a month or two months creates a  
14 problem both for the retailer in having deny accessibility  
15 to the food stamp recipient, as well as the opportunity to  
16 serve that food stamp recipient.

17           The second goes back to the EBT Interoperability  
18 and the authorization. We have had some reports as we get  
19 up and as we, you know, have 40 or almost 40 states now  
20 fully on board for EBT operability, we have had reports  
21 where the system has gone down and the retailer is unable to  
22 get through on the hotline to have the minimum number of  
23 food stamp benefits made available to the food stamp  
24 recipient.

25           In this case, we've operated under the theory that

1 there would be a minimum order of \$40 that could be  
2 authorized on a manual system. And if that's not the case,  
3 then that inconvenience is the food stamp recipient because  
4 he's not being able -- he may be there, lined up ready to be  
5 checked out, but doesn't have the opportunity to make the  
6 purchase if we can't get through on that hotline.

7           The other -- the last issue that I think just is a  
8 question of as we go down the road and we look at EBT  
9 interoperability, the retailers are concerned about having a  
10 reliable infrastructure in place. And want to be sure that  
11 whatever is going to be the future of EBT, that whoever is  
12 going to be the service provider for that, be reliable and  
13 be responsive to the retailer and the food stamp recipient's  
14 needs.

15           It does neither the Food Stamp Program nor the  
16 retailer any good to be in the situation where he's not able  
17 to do an electronic transaction and be a service to the food  
18 stamp recipient.

19           And we would hope that we keep an eye out to see  
20 where technology takes us in the future so that we are on  
21 the curve, rather than behind the curve as we move forward  
22 in technological advances to serve food stamp recipients.

23           Thank you and we look forward to working with you  
24 in the future. Thanks.

25           MS. PARADIS: The next presenter is Deborah

1 Weinstein.

2 MS. WEINSTEIN: Thank you very much for this  
3 opportunity, Undersecretary Watkins and distinguished  
4 panelists.

5 For the record, my name is Deborah Weinstein. I'm  
6 director of the Family Income Division of the Children's  
7 Defense Fund. This is a wonderful, very retail opportunity.  
8 We even get to take a number. And I really applaud your  
9 openness and responsiveness to be holding this and the other  
10 hearings that you plan to have.

11 For us, we'd -- I'd like to talk in a somewhat  
12 broader fashion as we head towards reauthorization of the  
13 Food Stamp Program. For us, the basic statement that needs  
14 to be held firmly in front of us is that no child in this  
15 nation should go without food. And that the Food Stamp  
16 Program is a vital, vital support that needs only to be  
17 strengthened and certainly not weakened as we head towards  
18 2002.

19 That as we approach the reauthorization, we know  
20 that things are not heading in the proper direction for  
21 children and their families as regard to the Food Stamp  
22 Program. That we know that the reach of food stamps is  
23 shrinking when it ought to be expanding. Surely in this  
24 very prosperous time, we ought to be able to reach every  
25 hungry child and every inadequately nourished child.

1           And I know you're familiar with these statistics,  
2 but we know that in 1998, only 72 of 100 poor children were  
3 reached by the Food Stamp Program, whereas only three years  
4 before, it was 88 out of 100. That's the wrong direction to  
5 be going.

6           We know from the Urban Institute's national sample  
7 that people who had recently left welfare, almost half, 49  
8 percent of them said that at some point they were unable to  
9 buy food. And that in certain state studies, for instance,  
10 in Florida, 43 percent said at some point they were unable  
11 to afford food. And in Wisconsin, about a third, 32 percent  
12 said that.

13           What I wish desperately that I could tell you more  
14 about right now is a study that we have been working on in  
15 concert with many community organizations. We've been  
16 preparing a community monitoring survey. We have findings,  
17 we have survey responses from over 4,000 individuals across  
18 the country. And we're not quite ready. So this is kind of  
19 a teaser for you.

20           But we think that our findings are very important  
21 and in concert with what I've just talked about. What we  
22 know is that when people move out from welfare to work, if  
23 they continue to get food stamps, they suffer fewer  
24 hardships.

25           Now, this may sound like the "well, duh" school of



1 analysis, but it is not. It is not something that's been  
2 clear enough and talked about enough. And we have  
3 documentation that we hope to share with you perhaps at your  
4 later -- one of your later forums. We should have this  
5 ready by the end of July and we can give you chapter and  
6 verse to show that where food stamps are received, they  
7 help. They make a genuine difference. When they're not  
8 received, work alone is not enough to help get families out  
9 of poverty.

10           Well, what have we learned? We know that there is  
11 this tremendous connection between TANF, the new world of  
12 welfare and the Food Stamp Program.

13           One very important lesson that we've learned, for  
14 example, as you are so extremely aware, in New York City  
15 when people were not able to get their TANF applications,  
16 there was not a whole lot of protection. When they weren't  
17 able to get their food stamp applications, there was some  
18 protection. And thank you for offering a lot of it.

19           But of course, it's the food stamp law and your  
20 regulations that afford that protection.

21           So for us, lesson number one is that the TANF  
22 structure versus the food stamp structure, don't go there.  
23 We need to fight the idea of a block grant with every fiber  
24 of our being. And we certainly pledge to be in that fight,  
25 and hope that no one really chooses to make it.

1           But we need to protect the basic promise of access  
2 that the Food Stamp Program should offer.

3           We've also learned from what's happened in the  
4 welfare program so far is that everyone who leaves welfare  
5 does not necessarily leave it for a better place. Not  
6 everyone is able to either work or work steadily. And what  
7 that tells us is that families that are sanctioned are  
8 sometimes families that are suffering and who don't have it,  
9 have the ability to comply.

10           And so, as we move towards reauthorization, we  
11 hope that the Food Stamp Program would eliminate full family  
12 sanctions. Again, food stamps are a vital part of the  
13 safety net.

14           Second, we know that the gateway to the Food Stamp  
15 Program has in the past usually been the cash assistance  
16 system. And that gateway is closing. For more and more  
17 families now. And we need to open new and different doors.

18           And so we fully support more outreach and more  
19 outstationing of food stamp workers and creative efforts to  
20 make sure that people understand and have access to the Food  
21 Stamp Program.

22           In this connection, we certainly support the Fork  
23 Act, which could give states and localities the resources to  
24 explore these new ways.

25           Third, people in this country legally ought to be

1 able to get food stamps. And so we, too, support the  
2 Kennedy-Specter Hunger Relief Act. And we also ought to  
3 make sure that families with high shelter costs are able to  
4 get more food stamps.

5           Fourth, we know that low income -- and this is it.  
6 Low-income working families need our special attention. In  
7 this new world of work and poverty, food stamps needs to  
8 make the difference.

9           We need to make sure that the doors are open to  
10 working families by eased recertification measures, mail-in  
11 and phone-in and less frequent recertification by not having  
12 needlessly duplicative requests for documentation. By  
13 working to have specific appointments so that when people  
14 who are working have to go to the office, they can do it as  
15 quickly and efficiently as possible.

16           That in -- we've heard reports that people often  
17 have to wait for many, many hours to be seen. And that it  
18 seems as though protocols could be established to encourage  
19 other more efficient practices.

20           I think I have gone through my list. That for us,  
21 this is -- we are poised in such an important time that we  
22 look forward to working with you to protect the extremely  
23 valuable safety net that is the Food Stamp Program and to  
24 work with you to strengthen it.

25           Thank you very much.

1 MS. PARADIS: Let me just make the observation,  
2 too, Deborah, for you and for others in the audience who may  
3 not have been here when we started this afternoon, that  
4 written comments will be very much appreciated. You have  
5 the opportunity to submit written comments between now and  
6 August 31st. So we look forward to that. Our next  
7 presenter is Roger Rosenthal.

8 MR. ROSENTHAL: Buenos tardes. Good afternoon.  
9 It's an honor to speak before and have a conversation with  
10 such a distinguished panel this afternoon. And I want to  
11 especially thank the Undersecretary who is so sensitive to  
12 issues that involve population such as the one that I work  
13 with.

14 The fact that you have the authority that you  
15 have, Madam Undersecretary, and that you apply that  
16 authority so sensitively is something that heartens those of  
17 us who are working with some of the poorest people in this  
18 country, and we appreciate it.

19 I do work for an organization, the Migrant Legal  
20 Action Program. My name is Roger Rosenthal. I'm the  
21 executive director of that organization. That organization  
22 is located in Washington, D.C., but today I want to try to  
23 bring you out a little bit into the field, away from the hot  
24 urban environment that we have, and imagine being out there  
25 just an hour from where we're sitting today in air-

1 conditioned comfort, out into the fields in the Eastern  
2 Shore of Maryland and the orchards of West Virginia.

3           The Migrant Legal Action program has for 30 years  
4 tried to serve as a voice for the poorest of the working  
5 poor, the migrant and seasonal farmworkers in this country.  
6 We work in a wide variety of areas affecting that  
7 population's living and working conditions. And I've had  
8 the honor of working for this population for 20 years, and  
9 have seen a lot of changes during that period.

10           Farmworkers are really often a forgotten people.  
11 And their barriers are just enormous. And a lot of folks  
12 who work and live in urban areas don't always understand the  
13 dynamics that they're dealing with.

14           The Food Stamp Program is an enormously important  
15 program for farmworkers in this country. In fact, it's  
16 probably the most important public benefit program that's  
17 certainly subscribed to the greatest extent of any programs  
18 by migrant farmworkers. And yet, the underrepresentation  
19 within that program is really enormous.

20           It's such a needed program because while  
21 statistics are difficult to find, migrant and seasonal  
22 farmworker families often earn only \$5,000 to \$7,000 a year  
23 for a family of four. You can see why in spite of the fact  
24 that they're working so hard and often travel 1,000 or more  
25 miles to get that work, they need that special assistance

1 that the Food Stamp Program does provide.

2           I want to try to make farmworkers a bit real  
3 today. And I want to ask everybody who had lunch today.  
4 Who had the time to have lunch? The panel, the people?  
5 Well, good. Those of you who had lunch probably benefitted  
6 that the community that I work with provides.

7           The lettuce in your salad or in your sandwich, the  
8 tomatoes in those sandwiches and salads were picked by the  
9 hands of human beings, people who are trying, they're  
10 struggling to provide for their families.

11           And they -- it's sort of ironic that in spite of  
12 the bounty that this country provides for all of us, a  
13 bounty which is so famous in the entire world -- people want  
14 to come to this country because of that bounty -- the people  
15 who are bringing the food to our tables on a daily basis are  
16 often hungry themselves.

17           And their children go to work hungry, they go to  
18 work and provide that food to us in spite of the fact that  
19 their stomachs are empty. And they're using their hands,  
20 their very hands to provide that bounty to us, in spite of  
21 the fact that they don't always benefit.

22           As you might imagine, I'm an attorney and I could  
23 go on for a long time, but I'm going to try to break  
24 stereotype here and be very brief in terms of my remarks.  
25 Just tick down some of the issues that are particularly

1 important to this population.

2           Number one, I want to applaud the fact that at  
3 your recent food stamp summit, you found as one of your  
4 goals, the importance of portability for the migrant farm  
5 worker community. As you might imagine, a population that  
6 works in different places, that travels in order to work,  
7 that goes from state to state, needs that portability.

8           A family may be certified for food stamps in the  
9 Rio Grande valley of south Texas, but when they move to  
10 Michigan, what happens? And it often -- there are often  
11 many barriers for them, unfortunately, in spite of implicit  
12 protections and explicit protections in the law, there are  
13 barriers to their access to the Food Stamp Program.

14           One of the things that you've done in the Food  
15 Stamp Program over time and that the statute mandates, is  
16 expedited service for those who are migrant. And we applaud  
17 that. But we were dismayed at the time that welfare reform  
18 was instituted that the number of days for those who do  
19 benefit for expedited service was extended from five to  
20 seven days. We strongly urge you to reduce that back to  
21 five, or use your good offices to work with the Congress and  
22 the rest of the administration to reduce that at least back  
23 to five, if not to a shorter period.

24           Another thing that needs to be done for this  
25 population is provide hours in food stamp offices or provide

1 outstations for food stamp applications that are outside of  
2 normal business hours.

3           The farm worker population is working from early  
4 in the morning till late in the afternoon. There's no way  
5 they're going to have access to a food stamp office. They  
6 need certain types of accessible providers. In other words,  
7 something out in the fields or near a place where they live,  
8 or an office hour, if they do have vehicles themselves, and  
9 many don't, that provides opportunity to go in the evening.

10           Another thing that some people have talked about  
11 today is the diversion problem. And obviously, we've heard  
12 that issue, particularly in the case of New York City. But  
13 I want to come and testify to you today that diversion is a  
14 serious problem in many rural areas, as well. And I suspect  
15 you're not hearing that.

16           When I talk about diversion to migrant seasonal  
17 farm worker advocates to people who work with the community,  
18 and I talk with them about the New York State case, they  
19 shake their heads and they say, yes, that is happening in  
20 many of their communities. And because they're isolated  
21 rural areas, I'm sure you're not hearing about it a lot.  
22 And that's an important area for you to be looking at and  
23 making sure it's not happening.

24           A couple of points about the proposed regs that  
25 you issued on February 29th of this year, to which we



1 responded on April 28th.

2           First of all, we applaud the fact that the  
3 proposed regs affirm that food stamp offices must  
4 affirmatively assist special needs populations. We think  
5 that that piece was some diluted in welfare reform and needs  
6 to be in there and, frankly, strengthened.

7           We're also were happy that you clarified that the  
8 state option to treat income of ineligible legal immigrants  
9 in a household is, should be done in such a way not to  
10 undermine benefit allotments for eligible persons who reside  
11 with the ineligible immigrant.

12           In the farm worker community, as in many urban  
13 families, there are mixed immigration status households.  
14 And people are very chilled about applying for food stamps  
15 for lots of legitimate reasons. But when they're taken  
16 through a system where there is more scrutiny on people who  
17 are not even really directly affected by the food stamp  
18 application, you wind up having lots of problems.

19           One of the things that's also very important which  
20 we had as a criticism in our comments is the fact or the  
21 issue of income information from nonapplicants needing  
22 social security numbers. Obviously you need income  
23 information from nonapplicants in order to verify household  
24 eligibility, but there are many ways of doing that short of  
25 insisting that there be a social security number or even, in

1 fact, asking for immigration status. It's not necessary.

2           And what you doing is you're chilling households  
3 that probably are some of the most needy households in the  
4 country from getting access to the program.

5           The final point I have this afternoon is with  
6 respect to linguistic and cultural access issues. An  
7 obvious one. I started my comments to you with a couple of  
8 Spanish words on purpose to remind you that there're a lot  
9 of populations, not just Latinos in this country, who speak  
10 Spanish, but many other populations who will not get access  
11 to this program, but who are eligible for the program  
12 because there are linguistic barriers.

13           Title 6, as you well understand and support, is an  
14 enormously strong tool that this Department has used and can  
15 use. But it's important to clarify and emphasize the state  
16 responsibilities under Title 6, and frankly, be ruthless  
17 with respect to the imposition of Title 6 requirements in  
18 situations where you need to have linguistically appropriate  
19 and accessible services. It's just not happening in many  
20 parts of the country, and it's important that that does  
21 happen. Not just in rural areas where farmworkers are, but  
22 also in urban areas.

23           And it's a place where I would urge you to do a  
24 considerable amount of work and to try to strengthen to the  
25 maximum extent possible under Title 6 your regulations and

1 your initiatives.

2           I want to thank you so much for the time this  
3 afternoon and for this conversation. And we will be  
4 submitting some written comments before the end of the  
5 period.

6           Thank you.

7           MS. PARADIS: Let me just take a moment to tell  
8 you all -- there was so much comment here, Roger, about  
9 folks in rural communities -- to let you know that I believe  
10 at all of the other conversations we're going to have, we've  
11 asked our regional officers who are setting those up, to  
12 provide telephone lines during the conversations so that we  
13 might get comments from folks who are not able to come to  
14 the conversations.

15           For logistical reasons, we've got all of those in  
16 major cities. But we're only doing seven. So we're only  
17 going to be able to reach a small amount of the country in  
18 terms of having people come in person.

19           So we will be letting you know about the telephone  
20 line so that folks can call in and make their comments  
21 during the conversation over the phone lines.

22           Our next presenter is Lynda Mosley.

23           MS. MOSLEY: Good afternoon, I'm Lynda Mosley. I  
24 work with Department of Human Services in Washington, D.C.

25           I just want to take a moment -- I don't have --

1 well, let me put it this way.

2 I piggyback on a lot of the concerns and a lot of  
3 changes that have already been recommended by the  
4 participants. However, to keep the continuity, I'd just  
5 like to know how we would get feedback of this conference.  
6 And perhaps, just a suggestion, we could have a food stamps  
7 conversation program follow-up.

8 Thank you.

9 MS. WATKINS: Thank you.

10 We generally are not responding to any of the  
11 comments that are made. This is your opportunity to give us  
12 some information. But we are transcribing all of the  
13 conversations and we'll have those available. And I am  
14 certain that our staff is going to want to put those on our  
15 Internet, rather than sending information out.

16 I'm saying this and Jean is looking at me and  
17 Joyce is looking down. And I haven't -- this hasn't come up  
18 before, so I make the mistake of saying something that the  
19 staff will do. And I'm sure Chris is like, oh, goodness.

20 But I'm sure we will make this information  
21 available and we'll find some way to do this electronically.

22 MS. PARADIS: And we just want to remind you that  
23 this is really just the first step in what we believe will  
24 be a very lively discussion over time in terms of how to  
25 improve the Food Stamp Program. Not just in terms of what

1 we can do here at USDA, administratively, but, of course,  
2 what might be done legislatively in reauthorization in 2002.

3           So once we've completed these conversations by the  
4 end of the summer, I think we'll all have the opportunity,  
5 then, to engage in the next steps. And I look forward to  
6 that being really a very productive -- a productive  
7 opportunity.

8           Our next speaker is Lois Kauffman.

9           MS. KAUFFMAN: Good afternoon, I'm Lois Kauffman  
10 from the Capital Area Food Bank, and I will be speaking in  
11 concert with Marian Peele, my co-worker.

12           At the Capital Area Food Bank, we're located here  
13 in Washington, D.C., and we're a member of the America's  
14 Second Harvest network from Chicago, which spoke, that we  
15 heard from earlier. Very proud to be with that.

16           We are the major food-relief organization here in  
17 the metropolitan Washington area. We serve 22 million  
18 pounds of food to our constituents in a given year. And of  
19 those 22 million pounds, approximately 6 million is produce,  
20 fresh produce that we get from a gleaning organization, as  
21 well as going to the Jessup food market, and produce market  
22 and other sources.

23           So we're very busy. However, we're very concerned  
24 with what's happening at the local level on food stamps.

25           Since welfare reform, we have seen a major

1 increase in emergency food, a need for emergency food. I  
2 wish we would see a major increase in available food. But  
3 we have to go get that and we are doing that.

4           When school is out in the summertime, like right  
5 now, we see a 40 percent increase in the need of food in the  
6 District of Columbia. Now, we are so grateful for the  
7 USDA's summer feeding program and we're working very hard to  
8 get that to become a more effective program. It is a  
9 wonderful program.

10           But we are also seeing that people need those food  
11 stamps and they don't have them. And this is where we know  
12 that one-third of the people who are eligible are not on.  
13 And I think in the District, it is even higher.

14           Now, we learned -- and I learned this really at  
15 the nutrition summit, although I had suspected it a long  
16 time. But across the nation, we have come to realize that  
17 food banks, as we see ourselves, the Second Harvest Food  
18 Banks and the local food banks that are throughout the --  
19 throughout what we call our member agencies that actually  
20 feed the hungry people, are a first line of defense.

21           Now, this is wrong. In the past, we have been the  
22 last line of defense. When all else failed, people came to  
23 the pantries, the soup kitchens, et cetera, to get their  
24 food. That is no longer true. We are where they go first.  
25 And we know part of that is because of all the things we've

1 heard today.

2           It's difficult to get to the food stamps, they're  
3 afraid of food stamps, they don't understand that they're  
4 eligible for food stamps. And we could go through the list,  
5 and we've heard them today. And I'm so grateful that they  
6 were all spoken, and I'm sure there are other reasons.

7           We know that we can do something about this. And  
8 we at the food bank are taking this on and are trying to do  
9 it. And I know that food banks across the nation are, as  
10 well. The Second Harvest Food Banks, as well as the  
11 agencies that we have.

12           When we talk about one-stop shop, that means us  
13 and our agency people here. Marian Peele is going to speak  
14 to that as well as some other things.

15           We also know the difficulty of using the EBTs at  
16 the farmer's markets. We are participating in setting up  
17 some farmer's markets. And we would like to encourage USDA  
18 to come out in front with making a simpler form. I don't  
19 know what it's going to be, but I know you have the  
20 expertise and the know-how to do that.

21           And to make an easier way to get those transfers  
22 done at the farmer's market so that -- now, I know at our  
23 farmer's market, they have to go out across the street, use  
24 their EBT, come -- it's complicated. Let's bring it right  
25 onto the table where the farmer has his or her food.

1           In education, we have a nutrition -- we teach  
2 nutrition, we've been hearing this, that we have to have  
3 nutrition. We do this in our area. However, as welfare  
4 reform has come into place, we have a harder and harder time  
5 finding -- I mean, the people want to come, but they're  
6 working two and three jobs now. They don't have time to  
7 come and learn how to cook.

8           So they have the food stamps, perhaps, and they're  
9 buying the fast foods with them because they don't have the  
10 time to learn how to stretch that food dollar.

11          And I have to tell you that when we had a -- we  
12 still have an audience. After they go through eight  
13 sessions of learning how to cook, using -- there's a  
14 nutritionist there, there's a chef there, and they go  
15 through that whole process of coming back and having eight  
16 lessons, taking all those ingredients home at the end of  
17 each lesson.

18          At the end on our graduation date, they are in  
19 tears. They're in tears with joy because now they can make  
20 their food stamps last.

21          One of those classes is held in a grocery store  
22 where they learn how to read the labels, they learn how to  
23 shop, they learn how, they learn how to do it. And it makes  
24 a huge difference. And we have people who have gotten  
25 themselves off food stamps with those lessons.



1           We need to encourage more of that. And we know  
2 that USDA does a lot of that with the FNAP and the CNAP.  
3 But we partner with those programs because they don't have  
4 the food. We have the food, they have the training, and we  
5 do a lot of jobs with them.

6           We have a hard time -- I have a hard time with the  
7 zero tolerance of food stamps. It doesn't seem humane. We  
8 have -- when you're dealing with a person in food that is  
9 coming to us in need of food stamps, they're already at such  
10 stress levels, huge stress levels, they can't cope anymore.

11           Now there's this zero tolerance. And I don't even  
12 know what all of it means, I'm always hearing something new.  
13 It just doesn't seem humanly possible for people to match  
14 up to that. And I challenge, I beg, I want you to start  
15 looking at that zero tolerance thing. It just sort of  
16 doesn't look like the real entitlement program that we know  
17 food stamps is to be because it just is so quick to turn  
18 people away.

19           With that, I'm going to say but one thing about  
20 Hunger 101, which is a hunger and poverty awareness program  
21 we do at the food bank. And it's for people like us,  
22 they're sitting right here.

23           And what it does is it takes us through being a  
24 person who is in need of food stamps, a person who is  
25 hungry, a person who is homeless, a person who has a low-

1 income job and puts you through about a ten-minute scenario  
2 of how difficult it is to meet sure requirements to feed  
3 your family and to get your food stamps when you have this  
4 huge page to fill out -- page? Pages. Twelve to 15 pages  
5 to fill out. And people give up.

6           And I don't care if I'm doing that exercise for a  
7 group of lawyers, which I have many times, a group of  
8 nursing students, high school students, inner-city kids, it  
9 doesn't matter. They all say when they come out, what were  
10 the emotions you felt? I felt angry, I felt distrusted, I  
11 felt humiliated, I felt belittled, depressed. And they did  
12 it in ten minutes. And these scenarios are based on real  
13 live people living in need of food stamps, that are on food  
14 stamps.

15           And I'm challenging you to call me, let me come to  
16 you with those programs.

17           I'm going to turn the time over now to Marian  
18 Peele to tell us a little bit about the agencies and how we  
19 see our communities at the food bank. And we will be  
20 providing you with a written report.

21           Marian Peele.

22           MS. PEELE: Good afternoon, my name is Marian  
23 Peele, and I'm the director of the agency relations at the  
24 Capital Area Food Bank. And I just want to talk to you a  
25 little bit about the agency's perspective from food banking.

1           Since 1996, our agencies have seen a dramatic  
2 increase in the number of clients coming to them requesting  
3 emergency food. Most of their clientele now are the working  
4 poor, people who have jobs and are on food stamps who just  
5 can't make the food stamps last till the end of the month.

6           I had an agency in 1998 close down recently  
7 because they had seen an increase in 150 percent for food  
8 requests, and they just could not keep their doors open.  
9 Food stamps have just become woefully inadequate for  
10 individuals.

11           We operate a referral hotline for District  
12 residents. One of the questions we ask each person is do  
13 you receive food stamps. Each and every one of them say  
14 yes, they just don't last.

15           Just recently, no more than two weeks ago, I had a  
16 senior citizen call and I asked her the same question. And  
17 she said, no, I used to, but the \$10 I was receiving just  
18 wasn't worth my trouble. So now she calls food pantries  
19 each and every month to help with her supply of food.

20           I think there's a few things that I'd like to see  
21 or like for you to consider that would help some of the  
22 situations that we see each and every day. One of the  
23 things is expedited food stamps. Right now, it takes seven  
24 days to expedite food stamps. And that's just not adequate.

25           I think when somebody is in an emergency

1 situation, an emergency is an emergency. And it needs to be  
2 dealt with and not within seven days. I think within 24  
3 hours. I know that Texas and Minnesota used to have a 24-  
4 hour expedited food stamps. And I think I'd like to see  
5 that.

6 I keep hearing the one-stop shopping; it's because  
7 it's a good idea. When you're asking people who are already  
8 low on resources to go here, there and everywhere to get  
9 their services, it's just asking too much. We need to be  
10 able to serve them in one service area.

11 And I just want to echo everything that I've heard  
12 here basically today. We would like to submit to you some  
13 written information from our agencies, as well as from their  
14 clients before the deadline. And I just thank you for your  
15 time today.

16 MS. PARADIS: Thank you. Lorraine Matthews is our  
17 next presenter.

18 MS. MATTHEWS: Good afternoon, Madame Secretary  
19 and to the panel. My name is Lorraine Matthews. I am here  
20 representing the Pennsylvania Dietetic Association, but I  
21 work for the Philadelphia Department of Public Health, and  
22 have done so for about 30 years. So I have seen people --  
23 I've worked in institutions and I currently work in the  
24 community section and I manage the nutrition programs for  
25 our health department.

1           And I'm not going to reiterate anything I've  
2 already heard today because I think people have spoken very  
3 eloquently. But there's a couple things that I haven't  
4 heard mentioned. And I really believe that everybody here  
5 believes it, but I just haven't heard it said.

6           And the first one to say as a nutrition  
7 professional, we have to say -- we have to get across to the  
8 policymakers, the lawmakers that food stamps, WIC, Child and  
9 adult food programs, the summer feeding program are not  
10 welfare. They are health care. We have to do that. They  
11 cannot be cased -- good. They cannot be tied so closely to  
12 TANF, and so on.

13           I have people in my office in clinics sobbing who  
14 work every day. In our city health centers right now, 63  
15 percent of the people who come to them do not have health  
16 insurance. They are the working poor. And they frequently  
17 do not get -- some of them have gotten food stamps, they --  
18 some of them may still be eligible, but we've heard about  
19 all the difficulties. Many of them have been turned away  
20 years ago. This is just -- we just have to do better.

21           By the time, by August 1st, I hope we'll be able  
22 to submit written testimony that shows the results of a  
23 study we're doing linking the rate of diet-related deaths to  
24 the lack of access to quality foodstores. We've done a map  
25 -- I haven't done it because I haven't got the slightest

1 idea how to do it, but we have this very smart young lady  
2 who does mapping, linking the parts of the city where we  
3 have fewer grocery stores.

4           And the rate of -- we just use three diseases,  
5 diabetes, high blood pressure and heart disease. And the  
6 overlap is incredible. And we're in the process of adding  
7 infant mortality to that so we can show just in Philadelphia  
8 County that lack of access to quality food isn't just a bad  
9 thing, it relates directly to mortality and morbidity.

10           The other thing I just want to mention -- we've  
11 heard a lot of talk about nutrition education, and one of  
12 the programs through the Food Stamp Act is the nutrition  
13 education program, NEP program. Pennsylvania is a latecomer  
14 to this, but because of those funds, for the first time, I  
15 have a minimum of 20 hours of nutrition counseling by  
16 professional nutritionists at every one of our eight health  
17 centers to help those folks who don't have health insurance,  
18 who don't have access, to learn how to take care of their  
19 diseases.

20           And I hope as we move through, toward  
21 reauthorization, that we continue to improve this because  
22 this has brought absolutely wonderful programs into our  
23 state and to help in a variety of ways in the Super  
24 Cupboards, the training programs, through our food co-ops,  
25 through our SHARE programs, our food banks and various

1 programs around the city and the state, to provide nutrition  
2 education to food stamp recipients and food stamp-eligible  
3 recipients.

4           So I just I'm know I'm preaching to the choir  
5 here, but I just want to say please keep it up. Everybody  
6 has spoken so eloquently on this whole issue and I just hope  
7 that we will move to the point where people do not have to  
8 struggle for adequate food in this country.

9           Thank you.

10           MS. PARADIS: Our next presenter is Kay Bengston.

11           MS. BENGSTON: I'd like to thank you for giving us  
12 the opportunity to come and speak for you today. We're very  
13 grateful for the Food Stamp Program. I represent the  
14 Evangelical Lutheran -- I'm Kay Bengston and I represent the  
15 Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

16           The Food Stamp Program over the last many years  
17 has been an effective and essential program in helping to  
18 alleviate hunger in this country. But we become very  
19 concerned when we see the numbers who are accessing the Food  
20 Stamp Program decreasing at the same time as we within our  
21 church food pantries are seeing the numbers increasing.  
22 Something is wrong and we need to do something about that.

23           We are continuing, continually as congregations  
24 going back again and again and asking people to bring in  
25 more canned goods, to provide more funding so that we can

1 increase the food that's available to individuals.

2           The faith community is quickly becoming the first  
3 line of defense against hunger. We actually cannot continue  
4 to increase those resources because they are not there.

5           Something needs to change and I think that you are  
6 about doing that now.

7           We talked to individuals -- I was talking to a  
8 teacher recently and she was telling me that she regularly  
9 brings granola bars to school in order to feed the kids who  
10 are coming to her during reading class and saying that their  
11 tummies hurt, they haven't had any food for breakfast. This  
12 is an immigrant community and families are working two and  
13 three jobs to make ends meet. And they're not allowed to  
14 access food stamps for the most part.

15           Clay and Beth are a young couple, also who are not  
16 able to access food stamps. Beth had a problem pregnancy,  
17 had to quit work, but because they owned a vehicle that was  
18 valued too high, they couldn't get food stamps. If they had  
19 been able to obtain food stamps, they wouldn't have been  
20 evicted from their apartment and they would have had some  
21 stability in their life.

22           Jody Silleger is a Lutheran pastor in Harrisburg,  
23 Pennsylvania. She's also a nurse and has started a clinic  
24 in the soup kitchen down the street. And she works  
25 particularly with people who have severe barriers to



1 employment, who are being hurt dramatically by certain  
2 changes in the welfare program.

3           She tells about moms who take day-old bread and  
4 buns that are provided at the soup kitchen and eat those  
5 before they go to bed at night and drink water so the food  
6 that is available to the family can go to the children.  
7 This needs to change.

8           I just say that I ditto everything that is been  
9 said here this afternoon. I think the suggestions are  
10 wonderful. We do not believe as the religious community  
11 that we are the only ones who are to serve those who are  
12 hungry. It's a responsibility of the whole of the  
13 community, not just those who choose to be part of churches  
14 or choose to give to the kind of charities that care for the  
15 poor.

16           I guess I would want to emphasis in closing, that  
17 one thing I think is particularly essential, is that we  
18 maintain the entitlement in the federal status of the Food  
19 Stamp Program, that we do not block grant the Food Stamp  
20 Program.

21           I think of a story about the eagle. When a mother  
22 eagle goes to make her nest, she builds that nest on a high  
23 cliff or a tall tree. And then she goes about getting  
24 leaves to soften the place where she's going to lay those  
25 eggs.

1           She lays the eggs, she cares for those eggs and  
2 cares for the babies once they are born. Then those little  
3 ones move as she eliminates some of the leaves and makes it  
4 a little more uncomfortable for them day in and day out.  
5 They move and jump to the top of that nest and gradually  
6 they gain strength and they will take off and they'll fall,  
7 but they begin to flap their wings and fly off.

8           But sometimes, sometimes there's a little eaglet  
9 that sits there and they're afraid, they feel they can't  
10 make it. And so the mother gets up and pushes that eaglet  
11 off their nest and it begins to fall to earth. If it  
12 doesn't flap its wings, the mother dives down, opens up her  
13 wings and allows the little one to lay on its back.

14           That's what a safety net is. We cannot lose the  
15 safety net. I think we need to think about the story about  
16 the eagle.

17           MS. PARADIS: Thank you.

18           Our next presenter is William Hariston.

19           MR. HARISTON: Good afternoon. I first like to  
20 thank the Undersecretary and Department for having these  
21 conversations, and I'm very glad to see that these  
22 conversations are happening across the country.

23           However, I am from West Virginia. West Virginia  
24 is a rural area. We are total 1.8 million people. We are  
25 55 counties. And within those 55 counties, most of those

1 counties have less than 10,000 people. And therefore, we  
2 have a lot of folks concentrated in one area and then we  
3 become quite rural.

4 I was glad to hear that there are some  
5 arrangements being made in the future so that people in  
6 rural areas can participate. However, I would like to at  
7 some time invite all three of you to come down into West  
8 Virginia and sit and talk with those of us and hear what we  
9 have to say, personally. I think you'll find it quite  
10 interesting.

11 MS. WATKINS: We accept that challenge.

12 MR. HARISTON: Thank you. Very good.

13 A lot of what's been said today are some of the  
14 same kinds of problems, and of course they would be the same  
15 problems because people are people. And programs are  
16 programs and barriers are barriers.

17 But in rural areas, there are other things that  
18 happen. And I just wanted to share, and we will, by the  
19 way, give you a written statement later that goes into a lot  
20 of detail about a lot of things. But I don't want to take a  
21 lot of time. I just want to point out some things.

22 It was real interesting to me that when the  
23 gentleman was here from the farmworkers, he was talking  
24 about a certain group of rural people. The rural people, of  
25 course, and I'm sure you know, are more farmworkers and

1 farmworkers are a part of what we consider in our state.

2           I should tell you that the organization that I  
3 represent is called the West Virginia Coalition on Food and  
4 Nutrition. It is a coalition of just about every faith-  
5 based organization, government organization, community  
6 organization and some businesses in the state of West  
7 Virginia who are concerned about the areas of hunger and  
8 nutrition in the state of West Virginia.

9           To our knowledge, we are the only statewide  
10 coalition that brings together all of these organizations at  
11 one time and then call themselves members of the same  
12 organization, even though we know that across the country  
13 groups work with each other.

14           But one of the major problems that I can almost  
15 point out immediately has to do with cost. And the cost of  
16 persons and recipients within a program, and in this case,  
17 the Food Stamp Program.

18           While folks in West Virginia value the Food Stamp  
19 Program quite well, and while folks in West Virginia think  
20 that the Food Stamp Program is one of the greatest things  
21 that has come down the pike in a long, long time, there are  
22 some problems when it comes to being in an isolated area and  
23 having to try to take advantage of programs. Some of those  
24 we've talked about. Things like being at -- having to go  
25 and sit and wait for long periods of time.

1 But the main thing that I think as we go toward  
2 the reauthorization is to really look very seriously at the  
3 whole issues around vehicles. Vehicles are extremely  
4 important. Either you have a good vehicle or you spend a  
5 lot of money repairing the bad vehicle. And at any rate,  
6 when you're using your money, what monies you have, you tend  
7 to need food.

8 If you're going to spend it -- and I guess what  
9 I'm trying to say is if you're going to spend the money on  
10 certain vehicle repairs, et cetera, that's less money that  
11 you have on food.

12 The whole issue of transportation becomes very  
13 important. Because, you see, you can't even get to a large  
14 grocery chain unless you have a dependable vehicle. If you  
15 can't get to that chain, then you pay more money in local  
16 small areas for food. And so, therefore, that car then  
17 becomes extremely important there.

18 Children are bussed for very long distances to  
19 school and then back. And so what happens is in order for  
20 your children then to participate in programs that become  
21 very easy for some urban areas, you'll find that it's more  
22 difficult and it costs money then to have children  
23 participate in different programs.

24 And every money cost is less money that a family  
25 would have for food. And if that's the case, then food

1 stamps become extremely important.

2           Outreach is a factor. Outreach simply because  
3 where people are located. And we would strongly suggest  
4 that outreach programs be looked at as you look at  
5 reauthorization.

6           We also believe that programs like cooperative  
7 extension service, extension services across the country,  
8 and particularly in West Virginia, are extremely important  
9 in supporting food stamp recipients. Those are the programs  
10 that we have found that were -- extension programs have  
11 people in every county within the state. And because of  
12 that, they are then able through the whole extension  
13 program, the USDA extension program, to offer services where  
14 there aren't necessarily services in other ways.

15           And so what in West Virginia, we have found that  
16 very -- found the extension program, a USDA program, using  
17 food stamp component monies to actually do the nutrition  
18 education programs. And these are going directly to the  
19 people within those counties. And we would like to see that  
20 expanded. Because right now, of the 55 counties, I think  
21 there's money only for about 16.

22           And as many people have said before, when people  
23 are educated on how to cook, how to shop and how to use  
24 food, they're less likely to need food stamps down the line.  
25 And even if they do, what happens is a lot more nutritious.

1           And so we would like to see a sort of supporting  
2 of some of those extension programs. And the food stamp  
3 component monies that go into some of those programs and  
4 we'll go into detail in what happens in West Virginia and  
5 how that works, expanded simply for those folks.

6           Of course we believe in the simplification of the  
7 process. We believe that zero tolerance promotes  
8 bureaucracy and bureaucracy promotes less simplicity, et  
9 cetera, et cetera. And so I think some of those things need  
10 to be looked at.

11           We support heartily the Hunger Relief Act and the  
12 Fork Act and we hope to see those become reality. But the  
13 thing that we hope most is that what we know -- there's two  
14 things.

15           First, West Virginia was the first state to have  
16 food stamps. And the first recipient of food stamps lived  
17 less than 35 miles from my present home.

18           So we know food stamps. We know all about food  
19 stamps and how wonderful they can be. And we know what the  
20 whole Food Stamp Program has meant to this country, as well  
21 as to West Virginia. And so we applaud the program.

22           We want to see that program strengthened. And we  
23 want to see that program strengthened in such a way that  
24 most of this country are not urban people who are receiving  
25 food stamps. They are working poor rural people. And we

1 want that not to be forgotten as food stamp reauthorization  
2 comes about.

3 Thank you.

4 MS. PARADIS: Our next presenter is Derek Miller.

5 MR. MILLER: My name is Derek Miller. Thanks for  
6 the opportunity to come before you today.

7 I want to talk not so much about the mechanics of  
8 the Food Stamp Program, changes that are needed. I think  
9 those have been dealt with quite well already. And I think  
10 FRAC, in particular, is as suited as anybody here to  
11 communicate those to you.

12 I want to talk a little bit about some of the  
13 things which we've learned through the coalition work which  
14 we've been doing up on the Hill this year. I'm the  
15 legislative director for Domestic Work for Results, and  
16 we're a grassroots advocacy organization. And we've been  
17 working throughout the year on the passage of the Hunger  
18 Relief Act. And I just want to communicate to you some of  
19 the things which we've learned.

20 In particular with an ear towards what is the  
21 rhetoric that has been effective up on the Hill this year as  
22 we think about moving the Food Stamp Program forward and  
23 strengthening it. Because we've learned a lot of things as  
24 we've met with congressional offices about what rhetoric is  
25 working and what rhetoric is not.



1           The first thing I want to talk about is we've  
2 heard a lot about the huge drop in the food stamp  
3 participation. And concurrently, the huge increase in  
4 demand for food at emergency food providers.

5           We've also heard about the private sector has done  
6 a heroic job of picking up these, of picking up the slack.  
7 The religious community has taken up a lot of it. Kay  
8 Bengston just talked a lot about the increases that -- the  
9 increased work and effort that churches are expending on  
10 this.

11           But I think that it's important for us to  
12 communicate to policymakers that as we shift resources from  
13 the public sector, from the Food Stamp Program to the  
14 private sector, this is not a neutral shift and it's not  
15 something just be lauded.

16           It's very important that we remember there's some  
17 things which public policy does well. And while I don't  
18 want to say that the Food Stamp Program is a simple one,  
19 because it's not, it requires different capacities,  
20 different skills and a different infrastructure. And it is  
21 very good at transferring a large amount of food to a large  
22 number of people.

23           Churches and private charities are very good at  
24 dealing with the intricacies of people's lives. You know,  
25 they work with families, they mentor them and that's where

1 they put their resources.

2           But to the extent that that sector is called upon  
3 to take on more of the work of emergency feeding, of  
4 providing the sort of first-line resources instead of the  
5 Food Stamp Program, they lose their ability to provide the  
6 ongoing support that deals with the complexities of people's  
7 lives.

8           So I think that as we work with Congress and with  
9 policymakers, we need to be very clear that this is not just  
10 a mutual shift of resources. You're undercutting the  
11 capacities that charities have, that churches have by  
12 forcing them to do more first-line defense work. And I  
13 think that's a very important thing to note.

14           I also want to talk a little bit about what some  
15 people have touched on briefly today. And that is how we  
16 talk about the Food Stamp Program. And in particular, I  
17 think it's important that we start talking about it more as  
18 a work support.

19           Yes, the Food Stamp Program is a safety net  
20 program. But it's also much more than that. And this is  
21 important not just in terms of in general, but as we look at  
22 the Hunger Relief Act, as we look towards the food stamp  
23 reauthorization, the discourse with which we describe the  
24 program is very important.

25           I think it's -- in my mind it's fairly safe to say

1 that the welfare law in '96 passed in large part because the  
2 congressional leadership was able to, to convince the  
3 American public of this -- of this portrait of the welfare  
4 mother, you know, just sort of sitting back and taking  
5 payments.

6           I think it's incumbent upon us now to recognize  
7 the icon of poverty is still a mother, but it's a working  
8 mother. And food stamps are not something which keep her  
9 out of a job, but which keep her in a job. And allow her to  
10 participate, not just to be employed, but to be employed  
11 sustainably and participate meaningfully in the American  
12 economy.

13           And I think that it is incumbent upon us to  
14 communicate that to policymakers and to help them recognize  
15 that the Food Stamp Program is a work support and we have to  
16 de-link it from this paradigm of, you know, of cash  
17 assistance.

18           And I also want to say that's something which is,  
19 has been -- which people up on the Hill this year have  
20 gotten. When we talk about the Food Stamp Program in that  
21 way, they understand and it resonates more. I don't want  
22 this to be -- I don't want this to undercut the idea that  
23 Food Stamp Program is also a safety net program, but I think  
24 we need to talk strategically at different times depending  
25 on who we are communicating with.

1           My final point is that I also, as we look ahead to  
2 particularly the food stamp reauthorization, we have to  
3 build upon the successes of the Food Stamp Program. I mean,  
4 in a forum like this we have an opportunity to talk a great  
5 deal about deficiencies in the Food Stamp Program, things  
6 which need to be changed and which need our attention. And  
7 that's very true. But I think it's also very important that  
8 we recognize that the Food Stamp Program has been a  
9 tremendous success. It's something which we should be proud  
10 of, it's something which we should be communicating to  
11 people.

12           It feeds millions of kids, it pulls families out  
13 of poverties. And frankly, it alleviates an enormous amount  
14 of human suffering. And this is something which we should  
15 be proud of and which we should communicate to other people.

16           Finally, one word just about the Hunger Relief Act  
17 and the Food Act. We've been working on that throughout the  
18 year and have been -- and working with you to talk about  
19 that. And we've been very pleased with the support which  
20 this office has given us. But we also know that the chances  
21 of the passage of the Hunger Relief Act are contingent in  
22 large part upon the degree of support which the White House  
23 gets it. And it has been supportive, but the question is if  
24 Congress ends up in a smoke-filled room with the President  
25 at the end of the year and it's all the President's men and

1 all Trent Lott's men, is the Hunger Relief Act going to be  
2 on the President's short list?

3           And we hope that this office will take an  
4 opportunity, ongoingly, to keep that on the President's  
5 short list. And to keep all the provisions of the Hunger  
6 Relief Act part of the final negotiations at the end of the  
7 year, which is very likely where that decision will be made.

8           So just to communicate to you thanks, but also  
9 urge you to aggressively encourage the President to keep  
10 this on the short list.

11           Thanks.

12           MR. PARADIS: Thank you, Derek. Next time I see  
13 the President, I'll mention it.

14           Our next presenter is Elaine Archangelo. And  
15 we're delighted that she came from Delaware. She's the  
16 director of Social Services there. Another example of high-  
17 level officials at the states who care about this program.  
18 Thank you.

19           MS. ARCHANGELO: Thank you for the opportunity to  
20 be able to communicate.

21           I want to focus, primarily, on two areas. One is  
22 program simplification and the other is on EBT.

23           I heard a lot since I been here -- I arrived  
24 around 3:15 -- about access issues and shrinking reach. I  
25 believe that there is a very strong relationship between the

1 complexity of the Food Stamp Program and the fact that  
2 people don't come in to apply. And the people who used to  
3 apply decide not to come in for a \$10 benefit, let's knock  
4 on the food bank door.

5           I heard some people say that people come into the  
6 food stamp office and leave angry. They leave angry because  
7 they feel like we ask them for an awful lot of information,  
8 we demand a very lot of verification. And sometimes, they  
9 get a very minimal benefit.

10           So I want to propose an idea. That instead of  
11 calculating every possible deduction that a person can get,  
12 that the Food Stamp Program simplify itself and work off of  
13 gross income. And look at their final gross income only,  
14 perhaps family size in determining benefits using household  
15 size -- and 8 to 10, perhaps, income bands, similar to  
16 something that we do in the child care program where  
17 depending on gross income and family size, a person gets a  
18 certain amount of benefit. The only thing they have to  
19 verify is their income.

20           And the food stamp allotment will correspond to  
21 the family size and the gross income so that, for example, a  
22 household of three with income between 20 and 30 percent of  
23 poverty, might receive 70 percent of the maximum allotment.

24           It would go a long way to making the program  
25 friendly to all types of people. The program is so

1 complicated that, yes, it's hard for the workers to  
2 understand. But it's very difficult for clients to  
3 understand that when they come in with huge bills, those  
4 bills don't impact the amount of their benefit. Because we  
5 don't allow them as a deduction or they don't -- they're not  
6 part of the -- they don't exceed the excess shelter  
7 allotment, to begin with.

8           So I think that simplifying the program certainly  
9 would be good for workers, you know, I'm not denying that.  
10 But I believe that it also would be very useful in  
11 encouraging people to come in, receive their \$10 or \$15  
12 benefits.

13           If we simplify the program, I think it also will  
14 go a long way to making it worker friendly. Currently, when  
15 a person is working, and we have lots of welfare clients who  
16 aren't working, we have lots of people that were never on  
17 welfare that are working.

18           And in the current economy, they have very great  
19 fluctuations in income. Sometimes they work 20 hours a  
20 week, sometimes they work 25, sometimes they work 15. And  
21 pretty much because you have to report almost any change in  
22 income, people have to report income changes all of the  
23 time. And it's complicated for them, it's complicated for  
24 us.

25           And we would like to see that perhaps people who

1 are working have an automatic six-month certification  
2 period. The income they come in with, the circumstances  
3 they come in with, those are the circumstances that we use  
4 for the entire time, except for major change such as loss of  
5 employment or change of job.

6           I just want to also mention that -- I think this  
7 relates to what I heard and what we believe food stamp  
8 clients think about the intrusiveness of the kinds of  
9 questions that we ask. They feel like we're asking them  
10 everything about their circumstances. They're interested in  
11 privacy. And they have to bring in all of their  
12 documentation, all of their bills if they want to allow it,  
13 if they want us to count it as a deduction.

14           So again, my pitch is to make it simple, work off  
15 of gross income, and only count -- this is a new one, only  
16 count liquid resources. Because, again, verifying nonliquid  
17 resources is complicated for them and complicated for us,  
18 and often doesn't have an impact.

19           I want to suggest that in the distant past,  
20 outreach was 100-percent fairly funded. I heard a lot of  
21 comments today about expanding outreach and eligibility  
22 offices being outstationed, and that sort of thing. So I  
23 would like to suggest that if we're going to consider  
24 increasing outreach or mandating outreach, that you consider  
25 federally, 100-percent federal funding for that activity.



1           Finally, on EBT. All states are mandated to  
2 implement it and we have the cap that it has to be budget  
3 neutral.

4           In a state like Delaware where our issuance costs  
5 are relatively small, in the current marketplace where costs  
6 for EBT are going up, apparently, every place. Where there  
7 are only two providers in the marketplace since states have  
8 very little room to negotiate, that we consider either not  
9 mandating it for all states, engaging 50-50 with states and  
10 whatever the costs are at the time that they move to the  
11 program.

12           And also, encouraging -- I hate to say mandating  
13 because you know I'm a state person, we hate to mandate  
14 anything. Encouraging regional development of systems so  
15 that small states like us can share costs across the region  
16 or two or three states could get together and share costs.  
17 And the interoperability I think helps to promote that  
18 thought.

19           Those are my comments, thank you for the  
20 opportunity.

21           MS. PARADIS: Thank you.

22           Our next presenter is Rachel Ostendorf.

23           MS. OSTENDORF: Thank you very much for the  
24 opportunity to speak here today.

25           My name is Rachel Ostendorf. I'm the outreach

1 coordinator at NETWORK. We are a national Catholic social  
2 justice lobby and we have about 10,000 members across the  
3 country. A significant amount of them are members of  
4 religious congregations, Catholic priests and nuns who often  
5 run or work in social service agencies, food banks, soup  
6 kitchens, et cetera.

7           In 1997, NETWORK released a study called "Poverty  
8 Amid Plenty." And we interviewed people in social service  
9 agencies in the 10 states with the highest welfare  
10 population.

11           The unique thing about our study is that we did it  
12 in person, not by phone. We think that if you're poor,  
13 don't have enough money for food, it's pretty unlikely that  
14 you're going to have enough to keep a phone running.

15           So we feel that by interviewing people in person,  
16 we really got to the poorest of the poor. And what we found  
17 is that of the people that we interviewed, 43 percent had  
18 either skipped meals or they couldn't afford meals because  
19 of costs. Twenty-five percent of them said that their  
20 children missed meals because of costs.

21           And the working poor -- in our study, we found  
22 that the working poor were just as likely to go hungry as  
23 those without jobs. And I know that similar other studies  
24 have found similar statistics.

25           We also found that there's been a shift in the

1 population at these agencies. It's no longer the adult  
2 single male who comes in. It's now more families that are  
3 coming in, mothers with children. And most importantly,  
4 what we found is that the Catholic community cannot keep up,  
5 we cannot meet the demand.

6 I heard somebody say before -- Kay Bengston,  
7 actually, who spoke earlier -- she said faith-based  
8 organizations are accustomed to being emergency sources for  
9 food, not grocery stores.

10 There's always talk about the partnership between  
11 faith-based communities and the government. But when we  
12 can't fill that gap, when we can't meet the need, when we  
13 have to turn people away when people are going hungry, it  
14 sure doesn't feel like a very solid partnership.

15 So I would just want to reiterate all the  
16 suggestions that were made earlier today, namely, the  
17 restoration of eligibility to legal immigrants.

18 I picked up a book that was out in the hallway,  
19 published by the USDA. And it has some of the Food Stamp  
20 Program guiding principles. And the first one is the Food  
21 Stamp Program fights hunger and improves nutrition among  
22 low-income households. Nowhere does it say anything about  
23 legal status. It doesn't say we'll fight hunger and improve  
24 nutrition among -- only among low-income households that are  
25 citizens.

1           We are a nation of immigrants. And it's pretty  
2 hypocritical of us, now that we have ourselves established,  
3 to turn around and say, well, we know that you are hungry,  
4 we know that you need our help, but since you're not a  
5 citizen, there's nothing we can do. You're not worthy of  
6 it.

7           Legal immigrants and their families are very hard  
8 working. Some of them have worked two and three jobs just  
9 to make ends meet. So I encourage you to restore  
10 eligibility based on need and not legal status.

11           We also support eliminating, or in the very least,  
12 increasing the vehicle allowance in the Food Stamp Program.  
13 The welfare bill told everybody, okay, go out and get a job.  
14 But a lot of those jobs, now, I think almost two-thirds of  
15 the jobs that are being created now are out in the suburbs  
16 where there's very little public transportation. So you need  
17 a reliable car to get to work, but you can only have a car  
18 that's worth 4,650. Where is that going to get you?

19           As I'm sure you know that a vehicle allowance has  
20 only been increased \$150 since 1977. A hundred and fifty  
21 dollars over 23 years. Let's put that in perspective,  
22 that's my entire lifetime. So there's no way that it's kept  
23 up with inflation at all.

24           We also support an increase in the shelter  
25 deduction or eliminating it would also be ideal.

1 I know that there's been a lot of talk today about  
2 technical policy and a lot of statistics thrown. So I just  
3 want to read a story from the study that we published last  
4 year. It's from a parishioner at a Catholic church in Long  
5 Island, New York.

6 "At our church on Long Island, refreshments are  
7 served to parishioners after Sunday mass. One Sunday toward  
8 the end of the refreshment hour when the parish hall was  
9 nearly empty, my wife and I came across a young man about  
10 15, and his mother, piling chunks of butter under a couple  
11 of bagels. He sheepishly told my wife that they had no food  
12 at home.

13 "Before I could get my hand on the wallet, on my  
14 wallet or tell the mother where she could get help, the  
15 young father appeared. A clean, well-dressed blue-collar  
16 worker. In a flush of embarrassment, he pulled his son and  
17 wife out the door.

18 "There's a real shortage of food in local food  
19 pantries mainly because of the increased demand. In  
20 addition, there are not enough jobs available here offering  
21 wages sufficient to support a family. There's an increase  
22 in numbers of the working poor.

23 "We're worried what will happen when there's a  
24 downtrend in the economy. Nonprofit organizations report  
25 that families are paying the rent and buying clothes with

1 funds originally earmarked for food.

2           "Personally, I can only imagine what that's like.

3 I can only imagine what it's like to go hungry. I can't  
4 even imagine what it would be like to tell my child that  
5 they have to go without food, to tell my seven-year-old  
6 niece, my five-year-old nephew, I'm sorry, you can't have  
7 lunch today because there's just not enough money to go  
8 around.

9           I mean, I know that I get kind of -- I lose  
10 concentration, my concentration, I get kind of cranky if I  
11 don't even have my pop tart in the morning. But people who  
12 are -- children who have to go regularly without food, how  
13 can we expect them to learn how to read, how can we expect  
14 them to learn their multiplication tables?

15           Education is the key when you have a full stomach.

16           I just want to thank you very much for the  
17 opportunity to speak today. And on behalf of the Catholic  
18 community that I represent, I urge you very strongly to  
19 seriously consider all the suggestions that were made today.

20           Thank you very much.

21           MS. PARADIS: Thank you, Rachel. That's really  
22 encouraging to see such an articulate young woman join our  
23 ranks as a hunger fighter. Delighted to have you here  
24 today.

25           Our next presenter is Andy Rivas.

1           MR. RIVAS: Thank you. My name is Andy Rivas and  
2 I'm with Catholic Charities, USA. Catholic Charities, USA  
3 would like to thank the USDA for its leadership in  
4 sponsoring this forum and is very pleased to be part of this  
5 important dialogue on the Food Stamp Program.

6           Celebrating our 90th anniversary this year,  
7 Catholic Charities, USA is the nation's largest private  
8 network of independent social service organizations. Our  
9 1,400-plus agencies and institutions with more than 280,000  
10 staff members and volunteers work to reduce poverty, support  
11 families and empower communities without regard to  
12 religious, racial, ethnic or economic background.

13           Among our many services are local agencies and  
14 parishes operate food pantries, soup kitchens, and provide  
15 naturalization and refugee relocation services to  
16 immigrants.

17           In 1998, Catholic Charities agencies provided  
18 services to approximately 10 million people. Our soup  
19 kitchens, food banks and other food services fed over 4  
20 million people, including nearly 1 million children. We  
21 also assisted 335,000-plus immigrants and with family  
22 reunification, education, legal and employment services, as  
23 well as language classes.

24           Aside from our perspective as a provider, we also  
25 bring the perspective of a longtime advocate for the poor

1 and disadvantaged. Our dual role of provider and advocate  
2 gives us, we believe, a unique perspective on the challenges  
3 inherent in ensuring the nutritional needs of our nation's  
4 poor, especially our children.

5           A lot of very good points were brought up during  
6 today's discussion. But as with our perspective, our unique  
7 perspective as provider, as well as advocate that we wish to  
8 say to the USDA that any changes in the Food Stamp Program  
9 we believe should be based on justice. Justice for those  
10 who are in need: adults, children, citizens and legally  
11 present immigrants.

12           We hope and we will be glad to work with USDA in  
13 any way of achieving efficiency within the program to feed  
14 and to take care of those people who are in need.

15           I would wish to keep my comments short. A lot of  
16 great things were said by some other people that were just  
17 up before me. We support them and we will support USDA as  
18 this administration continues.

19           Thank you very much.

20           MS. PARADIS: Thank you.

21           Let me just say I know people are tempted because  
22 they keep, they think they've heard the same thing over and  
23 over and over to sort of gloss over that. But in terms of  
24 establishing a record, I think it's real important that if  
25 you don't say it orally, you at least submit written



1 comments that make those recommendations. Because when all  
2 is said and done, I think the body of those recommendations  
3 can be extraordinarily powerful.

4           So as you're thinking about what to submit in  
5 writing, or as you're advising people with respect to future  
6 conversations, you might keep that in mind. That it's  
7 important that we have hundreds of comments on vehicles, for  
8 example, or urging simplification.

9           Is there anyone in the audience who's not signed  
10 up to speak, but would like to speak? We have an  
11 opportunity now, we don't have anyone else that has signed  
12 up. But we're going to continue to stay here for awhile.

13           And so, if there's anyone who's been listening  
14 this afternoon and would like to add any comments, this is  
15 an opportunity for you to do that.

16           Patrick? Patrick, why don't you go up to the  
17 microphone so you can hear us. Patrick works with us at FNS  
18 as one of our key food stamp staff people.

19           MR. WALDRON: My question is for the audience. I  
20 know a number of speakers have mentioned so-called zero  
21 tolerance. This is the first that my colleagues and I have  
22 heard that term and we were curious about what that means.

23           MS. PARADIS: I assume that means our quality  
24 control.

25           MR. WALDRON: Well --

1 MS. PARADIS: Standards. But is there anyone else  
2 in the audience who would like to speak to that?

3 MR. WALDRON: Our quality control standards are  
4 not really zero, so we're curious as to what that means in  
5 terms of application to a food stamp household.

6 FEMALE SPEAKER: (From the audience, not at  
7 microphone) My name is Karen -- and I'm assuming zero  
8 tolerance refers to growth -- who permanently disqualified  
9 from the Food Stamp Program?

10 MR. MARTIN: It was difficult, Karen. I wanted to  
11 follow up on that myself because I wasn't sure what it  
12 meant. It certainly could mean that. The two people who  
13 used the term are gone.

14 In the context of the first person, I thought what  
15 she was referring to is that if there's any kind of an error  
16 made, the recipient has to pay the money back. And there's  
17 absolutely no tolerance for that whatsoever.

18 I think it was tied into payment accuracy, and it  
19 was unclear to me whether they were relating it to the error  
20 rate or to the fact that recipients were responsible to pay  
21 back money if they got a -- if they got \$5, you know, \$10  
22 worth of benefits too much, that, you know, there would  
23 recipient claims against them.

24 And I thought that's what was meant, but I did  
25 make a note to follow up on it myself.

1 MR. WALDRON: Okay, well, we were very interested  
2 in --

3 MR. MARTIN: Pardon me?

4 MR. WALDRON: I say we were interested --

5 MR. MARTIN: Yeah. Yeah.

6 MR. WALDRON: -- in that terminology because I  
7 hadn't heard that before.

8 MALE SPEAKER: (From the audience, not at  
9 microphone) I used it briefly. I was talking of the error  
10 rate that is required by the Food Stamp Program to states.  
11 In other words, to make things -- and that is a zero  
12 tolerance, is it not?

13 MR. MARTIN: No, it's not really because we have a  
14 national average. And there's a sanction applied only if  
15 you go above that. So for example, the national error rate  
16 was 9-point-something this year. So any state that was  
17 making errors only up to 9, 9 1/2 percent didn't have to pay  
18 anything.

19 So there is a tolerance there almost up 10 percent  
20 this year. It varies from year to year. Sometimes it's  
21 even higher than 10 percent. So that's why it was --

22 MALE SPEAKER: Then I stand corrected.

23 MR. MARTIN: It was confusing to me as to what  
24 they meant by the zero tolerance. And I -- I know it was  
25 one woman from the Children Defense Fund was the first woman

1 who used it, and I know I'm going to give her a call to find  
2 out exactly what she meant.

3 MS. PARADIS: Let me ask for those of you who were  
4 here through much of the afternoon. Since this was our  
5 first conversation, we're going to have six more, if there  
6 might be some recommendations or suggestions for us as we  
7 put the finishing touches and finalize the plans for those  
8 other conversations, in terms of how we might be able to do  
9 things different or better. Any thoughts on that we might  
10 learn from this afternoon's experience? Yes?

11 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER FROM THE AUDIENCE: It would  
12 be helpful if you talked about all the programs as an  
13 overview and not just the Food Stamp Program.

14 MS. PARADIS: The suggestion's been made that we  
15 talk about all of the programs and not just the Food Stamp  
16 Program so that it's put in the context. And it's  
17 interesting that you should mention that because both  
18 Shirley and I had the same thought this afternoon. So I  
19 think for our future conversations, we'll make sure that  
20 there are people there representing the other programs, as  
21 well. Thank you for that. Anything else? Kay?

22 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER FROM THE AUDIENCE: It was  
23 clear in the beginning, but it's helpful to reiterate --

24 MS. PARADIS: Right. Right, we'll do that. Any  
25 other suggestions on how to improve? Yes?

1           MALE SPEAKER: I'd just like to say thank you for  
2 the start of conversations. Could you talk a little bit  
3 about the agency's plan for the reauthorization that's  
4 coming up -- so the audience has a little better feeling for  
5 where they fit into this whole process of getting  
6 information about the Food Stamp Program.

7           MS. PARADIS: Okay. We can do that. Thank you.  
8 Ellen?

9           FEMALE SPEAKER: I just want to say that I think  
10 the first couple of -- but you may find as you are in other  
11 regions where people are traveling from greater distances  
12 than this one. I've heard suggestions from people that, for  
13 instance, people from the land, driving from North Carolina,  
14 they may find it useful to have a slot ahead of time so they  
15 know if they're driving a long distance, what portion of the  
16 session to come to. But we really do applaud the openness  
17 and -- but I can tell you people to travel the other regions  
18 where the distances are greater, we've heard that people may  
19 want to have some time slots so they can schedule the drive.

20           MS. PARADIS: I appreciate that. Is anyone aware  
21 -- yes?

22           UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER FROM THE AUDIENCE: Yes.

23           MR. PARADIS: Right. I think the telephone line  
24 will be available for anyone who wants to phone in. Our  
25 thought is that it's going to be difficult for people to,

1 out of region, to be able to travel to the site. And so  
2 this will give them an opportunity, whether they live in a  
3 nearby city or rural country. I appreciate that suggestion.

4           Is anyone aware of someone that will be coming  
5 between now and 7:00 to make a presentation? I know a lot  
6 of you were very helpful in terms of helping us get  
7 presenters for the day and reaching out to all the various  
8 communities. And I just wonder if there's an awareness that  
9 there might yet be people coming. Two more.

10           FEMALE SPEAKER: That I know of.

11           MR. PARADIS: Okay. Because we're prepared to  
12 stay if we know that there're people coming. Otherwise,  
13 probably not all of you want to stay, so let me thank you  
14 for this really wonderfully stimulating afternoon. And I  
15 think it makes us very excited about the rest of the  
16 conversations. And thank you for all of your commitment to  
17 the program. And let me give Shirley an opportunity to make  
18 some closing remarks, as well.

19           MS. WATKINS: I join Julie in thanking all of you  
20 for being here this afternoon. And I also want to thank our  
21 staff from the mid-Atlantic region, as well as the F&S staff  
22 for all of your hard work in pulling this off. And we  
23 congratulate you because we know that this happened and we  
24 had to do this the quickest since it was going to be the  
25 first conversation that we would have. And we know how

1 difficult this was for all of you. But we thank you for  
2 helping to make certain that this was going to be a success.  
3 And this would serve as a model as we move around the  
4 country.

5           You probably have been wondering, well, what are  
6 we going to do with all of this and kind of what the time  
7 frame is. And perhaps we should have said that at the  
8 beginning, and we will do that for the other conversations  
9 that we will have.

10           Obviously, our whole thrust is that our largest  
11 program that's going to be reauthorized in 2002 needs a lot of  
12 attention and a lot of discussion as we move into that  
13 phase. We want to make certain that it continues to be the  
14 best program to provide services for people in this country.  
15 And that it is a federal program and we want to make  
16 certain that we can continue to only enhance the program for  
17 the people we serve.

18           And as we do that, we think it's critical that we  
19 look at how we can strategize reauthorization for the  
20 program for 2002. All of you know that we're looking at,  
21 already, a 2002 budget.

22           And whatever we are going to do, if it's possible  
23 to put some of those kinds of strategies in the 2002 budget,  
24 we'd like to do that. And that's one of the reasons why we  
25 push the time frame up to try to finish these by the end of

1 August, which gives us September and October to put some  
2 things together and have something that all of you will know  
3 what is in that piece. That we can start working toward as  
4 a strong partnership on behalf of working poor families and  
5 children in this country.

6           So we have a lot of work to do, as Julie said.  
7 And it's going to take all of us working together so that  
8 we're all in sync on what this should be in the way of  
9 protecting that safety net.

10           We look forward to working with all of you, and I  
11 can't thank our regional administrators enough. Chris,  
12 being the first one. And for those who are going to follow  
13 in his footsteps to make this be the kind of program that we  
14 expect it to be.

15           We're grateful that one of our public affairs  
16 directors from the Chicago regional office has joined us so  
17 that he could see what happened today. And he wants to make  
18 certain that that one in Chicago is even better.

19           So to know that we have staff here looking to see  
20 what this was like and how we can make it better is going to  
21 just make this more rewarding. Thank you, Chris.

22           MR. MARTIN: Thank you very much.

23           MS. WATKINS: It was real special to have  
24 Congresswoman Eva Clayton. And just so all of you know, we  
25 will be inviting congressional members who are in all of



1 those other regions to come out and join us. And if you  
2 know of other people that we should encourage to come out  
3 and join us and participate in these discussions, please  
4 don't hesitate to let us know.

5 Well, unless you have something else to say to us,  
6 we appreciate you being here. We're just going to sit here  
7 and chill out and wait for someone else to come. It's fun  
8 for all of us.

9 (Discussion off the record.)

10 (On the record.)

11 MS. WATKINS: Okay, you get your comments in just  
12 like everyone else.

13 MS. MARESCA: My name is Andrea Maresca. And I  
14 guess I'm just here as a concerned citizen who wants to  
15 share some thoughts that I had about improvements in the  
16 Food Stamp Program.

17 For the past probably 10 months or so, I've had  
18 the unfortunate privilege of going around to speak with  
19 people who do use federal benefits, such as food stamps, and  
20 an opportunity to talk to them one-on-one about experiences  
21 they've had, and as well as my own personal experiences  
22 concerning the program.

23 And first, I guess -- I don't know if I  
24 necessarily have any concrete solutions, but just anecdotal  
25 sort of things and just, I think, simple things that might

1 need to be addressed and looked into further. And I know  
2 that other people have shared these concerns, as well.

3           The first one is the recertification process and  
4 how that has been a real issue for a lot of people in the  
5 short time period that they're required to go in. I don't  
6 really, I honestly don't know, I'm not an expert on the  
7 program, but I do know that a three-month time period  
8 requiring people to go back to an office or to -- even if  
9 they don't have to go back to the office, but three months  
10 is an extremely short period of time to have to recertify.

11           And I think that it should be examined further as  
12 to more reasonable time periods for recertification,  
13 especially when your income is fluctuating. You're just  
14 starting a job and people, if they're penalized for a  
15 dramatic increase in their income when they just started, to  
16 have to go back and recertify right away is, seems a little  
17 extreme.

18           Another point that I wanted to bring up was, I  
19 currently, one of my roommates tried applying for food  
20 stamps. And the experience she encountered was she was  
21 asked to report the incomes of her other household members.  
22 And I don't, I see that as, while we live in the same  
23 household, we're completely separate families, I guess.

24           And her having to report what I make, I feel  
25 that's an infringement on my privacy. And it shouldn't be a

1 requirement for her and it shouldn't penalize her if I make  
2 an income that is, that makes her ineligible, I guess is  
3 what I'm trying to say.

4 I've had the opportunity to speak with a lot of  
5 community groups, focus groups that are getting together to  
6 talk about welfare reauthorization and food stamp  
7 reauthorization.

8 And some of the concerns that they raise were that  
9 the application process is extremely complicated. It's  
10 pages upon pages and they have, they feel there, that the  
11 information that they are required to provide is so extreme  
12 and that they're continually having to prove, rather than  
13 people accepting what they say. And the paper that they  
14 have to just mull through.

15 And a lot of the people are, English may not be  
16 their first language. They have a difficult time  
17 understanding even if it's in, for example, Spanish. They  
18 don't, they can't get through the application, basically.  
19 They don't feel that it's an emergency system for them, that  
20 proving their need is a burden, an undue burden.

21 They don't feel it's an emergency process that  
22 they can go in and apply. And I think that one of the  
23 programs, one of the ways to address this is through a  
24 simplified application process which is being utilized in  
25 some areas, as I understand.

1 Another suggestion would be addressing the stigma  
2 that's associated with the Food Stamp Program. And I think  
3 that looking into changing the name of the program. Because  
4 it has been recognized as the Food Stamp Program of a  
5 welfare program when really that's, I think that that is  
6 changing.

7 And we might want to examine that opportunity to  
8 maybe change it to "coupons" because everyone loves to use  
9 coupons and save money. I know that there're senior coupons  
10 that work very similar to food stamps. I'm not exactly sure  
11 of the details about that, but it would be something that I  
12 suggest that USDA looks into or FNS looks into.

13 Also perhaps partnering more with nonprofits that  
14 deal more frequently and that may be more, that may be  
15 closer to where people live, more accessible. And also more  
16 frequent contact with them, who have a better relationship  
17 with them. If that Food Stamp Program could somehow be  
18 connected more with nonprofit.

19 Also expanding the types of products that can be  
20 purchased with food stamps. I recently worked in a food  
21 bank and visited a lot of the agencies that utilized our  
22 food bank. And one of the requests that people always came  
23 in for were paper products, toiletries, toothbrushes, things  
24 of that nature. And that was one of the concerns they had.

25 They could never afford that and they would always

1 have to come to the local food pantry to ask do you have any  
2 toothbrushes that week. And you have to ration these things  
3 out to people. You get a toothbrush once a year or  
4 something you can give out to a family. And those -- I  
5 mean, those products are oftentimes more expensive than  
6 food.

7           And if we hope to allow people to present  
8 themselves in a respectable manner in their work, at school,  
9 then I think we should afford them the opportunity to use  
10 food stamps to purchase these types of products. And those  
11 are my simple and short thoughts I just wanted to express.  
12 Thank you for the opportunity to share these.

13           (Applause.)

14           MS. WATKINS: We appreciate you giving us your  
15 comments, and we'll continue to wait. And let's feel free  
16 to network again until someone else comes.

17           (Discussion off the record.)

18           (On the record.)

19           MS. WATKINS: Okay. Now I guess I really am on.  
20 We've a couple of people who would like to make some  
21 comments, and we want to make certain that we can include  
22 all of our friends in the conversation today. And I hope I  
23 don't mispronounce your name, and I probably will. And for  
24 fear that I will do that, you want to just give us your name  
25 and what organization you're representing. And I understand

1 we have Marcela, Marcelia?

2 FEMALE SPEAKER: Marcela.

3 MR. WATKINS: Marcela. So I did do it right at  
4 first. I should have just left it alone after that. Okay.  
5 So as soon as Adia?

6 FEMALE SPEAKER: Adey.

7 MS. WATKINS: Adey. As soon as Adey finishes,  
8 then Marcela, you can come up. Thank you so much for being  
9 here.

10 MS. FISSEHA: Thank you. My name is Adey Fisseha  
11 and I'm here on behalf of the National Immigration Law  
12 Center. The National Immigration Law Center is a nonprofit,  
13 nonpartisan public interest law firm that exists to protect  
14 the rights of low-income immigrants.

15 Immigrants are challenged by the same problems  
16 that all others face in the current Food Stamp Program. But  
17 beyond that, many immigrants are confronted with the even  
18 larger problem of not being able to access food stamp  
19 benefits because of the date they enter the country.

20 Even when they're eligible, immigrants often face  
21 huge barriers that keep them from getting help. This  
22 includes the lack of qualified interpreters and culturally  
23 and linguistically appropriate materials which reflect the  
24 population served.

25 Complicated eligibility rules, misinformation and

1 fear have also discouraged immigrants from using even the  
2 most basic services, despite their eligibility. I want to  
3 share with you a short example of one of the thousands of  
4 lawfully present immigrant families that are not eligible  
5 for food stamps under the current law.

6           Mr. Saied and his family immigrated to the U.S.  
7 from Iraq in 1997. Their household consist of one U.S.  
8 citizen and seven legal permanent residents. Mr. Saied  
9 supports his family by working at a fast-food restaurant  
10 that pays him \$5.85 an hour.

11           He pays \$500 a month in rent for his crowded two-  
12 bedroom apartment. Only one family member's able to receive  
13 food stamps, but this is nowhere enough to supplement the  
14 family's poor diet.

15           Mr. and Mrs. Saied often survive on one meal a  
16 day, going to bed hungry in the hope that their children  
17 don't. With the enactment of the welfare reform act in  
18 1996, many lawfully present immigrants in this country lost  
19 access to critical services, including food stamps.

20           In 1997 and 1998, recognizing the devastating  
21 effects of the cuts, Congress restored benefits to some of  
22 the most vulnerable segments of the population. However,  
23 this change only restored eligibility to about 30 percent of  
24 those made ineligible by the 1996 welfare law. Those who  
25 remain ineligible include those, who like Mr. Saied, are

1 taxpayers working hard to support their families, the  
2 elderly and children who arrived in America after 1996.

3           In excluding thousands of immigrants based on the  
4 date that they enter the country, current law also hurts  
5 U.S. citizen children. One in 10 U.S. citizen children  
6 lives in a family with at least one noncitizen parent and  
7 one U.S. citizen child.

8           As non-citizen parents and siblings lose benefits,  
9 there's a sharp decline in total household resources,  
10 putting thousands of children at risk for slowed -- at risk.  
11 Sorry.

12           States have been forced to take up the slack and  
13 providing protections for immigrants in need. And about  
14 half the states have risen to the challenge. This has  
15 created a patchwork of programs of varied eligibility  
16 requirements and benefits, though most state replacement  
17 programs do not provide the same level of benefits as  
18 federal programs.

19           Furthermore, these programs are vulnerable to the  
20 shifts in the political wind. The financial burden on  
21 limited state resources is causing some states with large  
22 immigrant populations to sunset these programs, leaving  
23 immigrants struggling to meet their family's basic  
24 nutritional needs. The current Food Stamp Program does not  
25 meet the needs of immigrants. There're several key changes



1 that have to be made.

2           First, food stamp eligibility should be  
3 exclusively based on need. We cannot allow arbitrary  
4 measures, such as the date of entry, to be a litmus test for  
5 who receives to food stamps. To do so would be to undermine  
6 the very basis on which the Food Stamp Program was founded.

7           Second is the issue of access. There's several  
8 key changes which have instituted which dramatically improve  
9 the ability of eligible immigrants to access the Food Stamp  
10 Program.

11           First, outreach to immigrant community.

12           Secondly, to provide adequate interpretative  
13 services or bilingual staff.

14           Thirdly, offer materials in languages that reflect  
15 the diversity of the community served.

16           And lastly, to create a system of comprehensive  
17 confidentiality to eliminate the overriding fear within  
18 immigrant communities that information provided to gain  
19 benefits will be turned over to the INS.

20           In addition, there currently several legislative  
21 proposals pending before Congress which would restore food  
22 stamp benefits to lawfully present immigrants, regardless of  
23 when they entered the country.

24           It is up to this Administration to fulfill the  
25 promise that the President made when he signed the welfare

1 reform bill and helped to pass these modest measures.

2 Thank you.

3 (Applause.)

4 MR. WATKINS: Thank you. Marcela? You need  
5 another minute or two?

6 FROM THE FLOOR: Yeah.

7 MS. WATKINS: Okay.

8 (Pause.)

9 MR. WATKINS: Again, I just want to thank you  
10 there for being so wonderful and I know that you want to get  
11 back to, on the highway or on the train so that you can get  
12 back home before it's too late.

13 I just wanted to, just again tell you how much I  
14 appreciate you and all the hard work that you've done and  
15 how supportive you've been all day. Thanks very much. We  
16 appreciate you. Time to come and spend a few minutes with  
17 us this evening.

18 MS. URRUTIA: I'm happy to be here. Thank you for  
19 having me. And yes, it's been a little bit crazy today, so  
20 I apologize that it's taken me so long. But I'm just going  
21 to say a few things.

22 I'm Marcela Urrutia with the National Council of  
23 La Raza. And the National Council of La Raza is the  
24 nation's largest constituency-based Latino civil rights  
25 organization. It represents hundreds of organizations and

1 millions of Latinos throughout the United States.

2           Latinos comprise 12 percent of the total U. S.  
3 population, yet nearly 25 percent fall below the poverty  
4 rate. 34.4 percent of Latino children live in poverty. The  
5 majority of Hispanic children, of school-age children  
6 participate in school lunch.

7           Food stamps and WIC are incredibly important to  
8 Latinos. In the days of equal eligibility prior to welfare  
9 reform, 25 percent of Hispanic mothers received food stamps,  
10 12.3 percent were WIC recipients. And as a former WIC baby  
11 myself, I can attest to the importance of the program. And  
12 I have always been incredibly proud of the fact that I was  
13 born and raised in a country that ensured my nutrition and  
14 insured that I grew up healthy and went to school and later  
15 on was able to give back to my community.

16           And there are so many children out there and so  
17 many children in the Latino community that are similar, in  
18 similar situations. And so I always go around telling  
19 people that I was a WIC baby.

20           Farmworkers are another population that we are  
21 extremely concerned with. They are an especially vulnerable  
22 population. And food stamps and WIC are also incredibly  
23 important to them. And we think it's incredibly ironic that  
24 those, that those that harvest our food are often in great  
25 need of food for themselves.

1           There are so many barriers to accessing nutrition  
2 for Latino families. It goes on from, you know, cultural  
3 barriers, language barriers, eligibility barriers now, fear  
4 issues. It just goes on and on and on. And you know, just  
5 working with so many Latino families, I definitely can  
6 witness -- have witnessed those problems.

7           There're so many important steps that we can take.  
8 One of them would be restore eligibility to post '96, legal  
9 immigrants who are here paying taxes, working long hours in  
10 jobs that need to be filled.

11           We can ensure that farmworkers who are harvesting  
12 our food and one of the hardest working people in our  
13 nation, get emergency food when they need it. And we can  
14 also clarify for them that they are eligible -- what they  
15 are eligible for. I think there's an incredible amount of  
16 confusion out there and it needs to be -- we need to focus  
17 on that.

18           Of course, the public charge that you've worked  
19 very hard on and we really appreciate that. You've done  
20 wonderful work. Unfortunately, there's still so much more  
21 work that we, that needs to be done. And we appreciate  
22 everything that you've done and we will continue to work  
23 with you to getting the word out there and making sure that  
24 families know that they don't need to be afraid. That they  
25 can get nutrition for their children and for themselves.

1 And they don't need to go hungry.

2           If hunger is going to be a priority for this  
3 country, we need to make sure that some of these program  
4 barriers are changed, and that immigration laws are, too.  
5 As you know, there's this climate of fear. And we, as I --  
6 and the climate of fear to, that affects -- the climate of  
7 fear among immigrant communities, unfortunately, also  
8 affects the Latino community as a whole.

9           I mean, Latino families tend to be not just, you  
10 know, an immigrant family. It's an immigrant with a citizen  
11 with a citizen child. I mean, it's just a whole range of  
12 people within that household. And if you are -- if there  
13 are barriers to one family member, inevitably, that will  
14 affect the rest of the family. And they will either be  
15 afraid to access services or just simply won't know that  
16 they're eligible.

17           So those are some things that we need to fix. We  
18 need to make sure that there's a level playing field for  
19 Latino families. And we need to eliminate the obstacles  
20 that have been caused by some policies. And we also need to  
21 be extremely aggressive in terms of outreach and design  
22 programs to get food to the fields, rather than expect  
23 farmworkers to come in. We need to go out there.

24           And just hope for you to support policies that  
25 also strengthen the economics of work so that farmworkers

1 and, can get the food and other Latino families, who  
2 unfortunately, also, are tend -- like a lot of other  
3 immigrants, tend to go into low-wage work. If there's a  
4 more level playing field, we wouldn't have to depend so much  
5 on food stamps.

6           So we appreciate your work and your commitment.

7   Thank you.

8           MS. WATKINS: Thank you very much. And thanks to  
9 all of you for being here this afternoon with us. And we  
10 look forward to the other conversations around the country  
11 and for your support in helping us to get the message out  
12 about how critical it is that people come in and let us hear  
13 from them.

14           Again, thank you very much and to all of the staff  
15 at USDA and FRAC for your support, thank you very much, and  
16 good evening.

17           (Whereupon, at 6:11 p.m., the hearing was  
18 concluded.)

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Date of Hearing

We, the undersigned, do hereby certify that the foregoing pages, numbers 1 through 158, inclusive, constitute the true, accurate and complete transcript prepared from the tapes and notes prepared and reported by John Delpino, who was in attendance at the above identified hearing, in accordance with the applicable provisions of the current USDA contract, and have verified the accuracy of the transcript (1) by preparing the typewritten transcript from the reporting or recording accomplished at the hearing and (2) by comparing the final proofed typewritten transcript against the recording tapes and/or notes accomplished at the hearing.

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